

**GRIEF AND THE CURRICULUM OF COSMOPOLITANISM**

by

Samira Thomas

B.A., Brown University, 2010

M.C.P., Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2012

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## Abstract

In this dissertation, grief is explored as a path to enlivening and enacting a curriculum of cosmopolitanism. Grief in this research is understood as *that which presses heavily upon us*, that is, grief is not understood solely as bereavement, but as those experiences that weigh heavily on our lives. This research contends that it is through attending to the heaviness of people's experiences that the relationship between self and other – the foundation of cosmopolitanism – can become central to curriculum.

This research suggests that the traditional canon of knowledge that schools and curriculum developers rely on is primarily exclusionary to epistemologies and ontologies of the nonwhite and female world. As a result, the curriculum reflects only certain student populations while others are cast aside as ghosts haunting the curriculum. The undervaluing of certain epistemologies and ontologies in curriculum and society creates space for bigotry and the caricaturizing of the ghosts of the curriculum. Exploring cosmopolitanism while casting aside certain kinds of knowledge and ways of knowing perpetuates non-cosmopolitan realities. For cosmopolitanism to be enacted, it needs to be explored and understood beyond the traditional canon. This dissertation makes use of autobiography to disrupt the cosmopolitan canon.

Grief is inherently the endurance of violence, and it is through the Intimate Dialogue, a method of attending to grief inter-subjectively, that violence can be undone. This is a form of pacifism that sheds the notion of passivity and becomes an active response to violence.

## **Lay Summary**

This dissertation explores the cosmopolitan curricular value of attending to grief, understood as ‘heaviness.’ Grief is the response to structural and physical violence enacted in our world on a regular basis. The field of cosmopolitanism is critiqued for its violence in consistently centering European, male philosophers. Similarly, curriculum, it is argued, can be violent in negating and caricaturizing historically marginalized communities of people, including women, religious groups, and people of colour. By negating the histories and stories of these communities, the curriculum turns people into ghosts who haunt the classroom and our society, left intentionally unseen by power. This dissertation introduces the method of the Intimate Dialogue, a concept introduced by Ibn Arabi when describing prayer. The method of the Intimate Dialogue, is a hopeful act in which the participants take one another as the beloved, in an ethic of hospitality informed by the Quranic conceptions of cosmopolitanism.

## **Preface**

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All of this, Mum, is for you.

## Chapter 1: Introduction

*“Did you ever know, dear, how much you took away with you when you left?”*

*(Lewis, 2009, p. 61)*

The first time I held a gun I was wearing cowboy boots, a blue flannel shirt, and a coat to keep out the cold. It was December. I was visiting farms in Pennsylvania, and the gun belonged to a young girl, the daughter of the man who was teaching me to shoot. I hadn't particularly wanted the lesson, but since I was staying in this community, I thought I would participate in the local culture. This was a big part of their culture. The man who owned the gun had taught his daughters from a young age, I think he said they were five years old or so when they got their first guns. In my memory, the gun I was holding had a pink handle, but I can't be sure if that is a real memory, or just my mind pulsing with irony. A little girl's pink gun.

This experience wore on me. There was nothing appealing in the crack of the bullet leaving the gun. I didn't enjoy wielding this dangerous object in my hands. In the Maoist days of communist China, it was a popular saying that “Power grows out of the barrel of a gun” (Asia for Educators, 2009), but this sense of power did not rush through me. I held the gun and felt the weight of what it represented.

I held the gun, and like Edgar Morin's hologram, felt the violence of the world course through me. For Morin, “in a physical hologram, the smallest point of the hologram image contains the quasi-totality of information of the represented object. Not only is the part in the

whole, but the whole is in the part” (Morin, 2008, p. 50). My hands were unsteady as I held the gun, as if I held all guns that had ever existed.

Out of politeness, I smiled and made some perfunctory gesture towards having enjoyed the experience. Don’t offend the hosts, try anything once, I told myself. Everyone else thinks this is great, don’t be *that* girl.

In the months after this experience, there was an uneasiness that lingered. I had come close to something in a safe context, but I knew that in other realities, the gun was coercion, violence, and war. It was what created refugees, including those that I became close to as a child. My mind reminded me of this in vivid dreams on occasion.

Three months later, four teenagers entered the hotel where my mother was staying in Kabul and pulled out their little guns from their socks. Perhaps the first guns they had owned. Perhaps they had little blue guns when they were five.

Either way, I know the crack of the sound that she last heard.

Like gravity, this knowledge quietly urges its burden. It is a heavy knowledge ever seeking to pull me into its orbit. It is always waiting to devour. This heaviness has a name. We call it grief.

## **1.1 Dissertation Aims**

This dissertation is situated, as is all research, in the time and place in which it is written: in part in Canada, in part in the United States, in part in the air between the two. With my husband in America and my university in Canada, my research and writing happened often in relation to a border crossing, ever a moment of tension between this citizen and the state. This dissertation was written during the time of the Truth and

Reconciliation Commission in Canada. This commission addresses the horrific experience and consequences of the colonization of Canada and, specifically, the residential school system that tore young First Nations and indigenous children from their families and communities to attend residential schools miles from home. It was written in the time of the Dakota Access Pipeline protests that demanded the United States government not build a pipeline through indigenous land in North Dakota. Despite these protests, the pipeline has been approved. It was written and researched in the time of the Black Lives Matter movement, a response to police violence against black men and women in the United States. It was written and researched in the time of a Canadian federal election in which support was garnered for the Conservative Party of Canada when it chose to pursue a legal case forcing Muslim women who observe the tradition of the veil to uncover their face during the Canadian citizenship ceremony. Despite this appeal to Islamophobia, the Conservative Party ultimately lost the election. The same is not true for the election in the United States in which a candidate won despite what should be disqualifying statements against Mexicans and Mexican-Americans, women, Muslims, and refugees. This dissertation is situated in *this* time, in *this* place. Grief plays heavily into our daily experience. It plays out in our schools, as well.

Schools are often thought of as places, bound by walls; there is a sense that there is an impermeability between the two worlds of “school” and “not school.” And, in some cases, we consider them bound by the curriculum: it is perhaps assumed that if something is not explicit in the curriculum text, then it does not exist in schools. This is emphatically untrue – what happens beyond the walls of the school, in our wider society, reverberates inside the school. And, what is taught in the school, certainly, reverberates out. Schools and society are

bound to one another as products of one another. This is evident in a recent survey conducted by the Southern Poverty Law Center of over 10,000 American school teachers, counselors, and administrators, 90% of whom reported that the school climate had been negatively affected by the results of the 2016 Presidential election (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2016). What is most disturbing about the findings of this survey has been the correlation between diversity of the student body and a noticeable uptick in student fighting, fear, and discomfort. The schoolyard increase in swastika graffiti, as well as hate-filled comments directed against classmates who are immigrants, Muslims, Jewish, female, LGBTQ, black, indigenous, or who have disabilities reflects, in many ways, the public discourse that was tolerated at rallies for Presidential candidate Trump. Many of these incidents cite President Trump, his words, or his ascent to power. Given the ties that bind Canada and the United States, it is unsurprising that incidents like the Quebec City Mosque shooting and the hate-filled graffiti in an East Vancouver school have occurred, citing the rhetoric of the United States.

Schools have historically been considered sites of citizenship education; they are places where a nation's young learn to become members of their society, for better or for worse. Schools name the kind of behavior described in the survey as 'bullying,' but it goes beyond what bullying encapsulates. These acts are tied to political power dynamics and, as such, are intimately connected to the curriculum these children are experiencing in the world. Technology enables a faster and broader connection between students and a world of content that may not be factual, and that may incite violence, hatred, and bigotry. Schools have a unique opportunity in the context of the rising tide of fear and hatred: they have access to virtually every child in Canada and the United States from the ages of 5 years old.

This dissertation is a response to the opportunity schools hold. The research is premised on the notion that each person experiences grief, and that grief, be it grief resulting from feeling like an outcast, sensing cultural threat, violence, or losing a loved one or a sense of home, binds humanity regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation, or nationality. It is, in a sense, an alternative to the conversation around acknowledging privilege, which so few people are willing to do for themselves. Instead, we may start in a place of acknowledging our own grief and the grief of others. I do not believe that we will achieve the kind of social inclusion and cohesion we seek by demanding those who hurt us to recognize their privilege in being able to do so. Instead, the power that we as humans hold to one another is to be able to share our grief and from there, build a positive way to relate to one another. This dissertation makes the argument that while grief is often an unwelcomed experience, it is not one to be shied away from in school, or in society more broadly. Indeed, as this dissertation explores, grief may be a perfect avenue through which to actively resist the violence of that which grieves us, illuminating a curriculum of cosmopolitanism. Not necessarily the cosmopolitanism of grand politics, but the cosmopolitanism of individuals recognizing the self in the other, and the other within the self. The relationship between the self and other may offer a movement towards cosmopolitanism at a broader level, but leaves room for each individual to unfold into their relationship with their own grief and the grief of others, and in so doing, leaves room for reflection and action. By attending to grief, we do not make the grief deeper, but instead, open it up to transformation. Our students, our teachers, our administrators are all grieving, whether we acknowledge it or not. Through this research, we can begin to find ways to acknowledge this grief, and indeed, transform it. In describing the pedagogical role of suffering, David Jardine (2015) explains that:

There is a joy to be had in the practice of turning towards suffering and letting it be what it is. It is not had in reveling in the pain of others or wallowing in their or one's own endurances. It is had because that practice, properly practiced, can change the nature of that suffering and our relation to it (p. 231).

The dissertation, then, turns towards grief in an effort to change our relations to it; in order to find lightness. This research seeks to explore the question: *what is the educative significance of grief in illuminating a curriculum of cosmopolitanism?* Through this research, the contours of the terms grief and cosmopolitanism are further defined and illuminated.

This dissertation emerges with two primary conclusions for the educative significance of grief in the context of cosmopolitanism. First, it is an opportunity to create space within the curriculum for those who have been invisible and marginalized to date. Second, through creating this visibility, the curricular experience offers a path to undoing the violence of marginalization and unfolding in cosmopolitanism.

This research approaches grief as an educational experience through Aoki's understanding of being-in-the-world as an educative experience, as well as his optimism of the opportunity of living in the margins. In a sense, this dissertation is a grasping of the opportunity that grief offers, unwelcomed though it may be. Grief is an experience that pushes us from "flowing within the mainstream" (Aoki, 1979, p. 336), forcing each of us to exist in the margins with our burden where we move more slowly:

This kind of opportunity for probing does not come easily to a person flowing within the mainstream. It comes more readily to one who lives at the margin – to one who lives in a tension situation. It is, I believe, a condition that makes possible deeper understanding of human acts that can transform both self and world, not in an instrumental way, but in a human way (Aoki 1979, p. 336).



Grief is living in a “tension situation.” To study our burdens is not to reject the burdens of others, but an opening up of understanding. Grief is an unwritten curriculum that gently urges us to study and explore, and in so doing, create space to find the other within. It is in this process of study and exploration that self-knowledge and self-estrangement emerge, guiding us to a deeper understanding that Aoki (1979) describes.

This dissertation is a study of self-knowledge and self-estrangement through grief. It is the first step towards a transformation of “both self and world, not in an instrumental way, but in a human way” (Aoki, 1979, p. 336).

## **1.2 Overview of Chapters**

While the dissertation derives from an autobiographical exploration of grief, it is also a study that is potentially educative more generally. This research uses the method of the Intimate Dialogue, a method theorized out of the philosophy of reciprocal prayer between the lover and the Beloved in Ibn Arabi’s Sufi thought (Corbin & Manheim, 2014). Through this method this dissertation seeks to first offer a deeper understanding of grief and its relationship to curriculum studies and to cosmopolitanism in particular. Second, this research seeks to not only demonstrate one way of giving an account of oneself, but to offer an intimate glimpse into the realities of grief as they are experienced and studied by one individual. In so doing, it opens the Intimate Dialogue with the reader, who is welcomed into this text and invited to respond with their own unfolding of grief and a deeper understanding of the cosmopolitan relationship between self and other.

In Chapter Two I explore what grief is and how its study may contribute to the field of curriculum studies. In particular, I explore the ways in which grief, violence, and

cosmopolitanism are associated through curriculum studies. I posit that the educational value of exploring grief in the curriculum lies in the potential grief holds to enliven a conversation about cosmopolitanism. In particular, I address the “ghosts of curriculum” (Doll, 2002), which are not only, as Doll (2002) argues, the philosophies and methods that haunt curriculum studies, but also the people who are forgotten and misrepresented by the curriculum itself.

In Chapter Three I explore the method I use in engaging grief in an Intimate Dialogue. Doll (2002) bemoans the omnipresence of method: “method currently lies at the heart of our educational enterprise: it shapes our textbooks, our curriculum plans, our ways of teaching, and our ways of teaching others how to teach” (p. 81). David Jardine (2012) alleges that “method has no face, no body, no memories, no stories, no blood, no images, no ancestors, no ghosts, no inhabitants, no habits, no habitats, no relations, no spirits, no monsters, no familiars” (p. 161). Therefore, Jardine (2012) argues, that method, is disembodied from the story and the spirit of the student. These elements of story and spirit also emerge as important themes in Doll’s work (2009). I present the Intimate Dialogue as a *method* in its original meaning, as a path along which research may walk, connecting story and spirit along the way. The Intimate Dialogue in this research acts as a bridge of love through which an active pacifism can be understood. In the subsequent chapters, I enact the Intimate Dialogue with three forms of grief in my life: the slow violence of religious alterity, the slow and active violence of womanhood, and the violence of war.

In Chapter Four, I explore the grief of being Muslim today. Taking the frame of entanglement, I trace through history the tension between Islam-as-peace and Islam-as-terror from the perspective of a Muslim woman.

In Chapter Five, I explore the heaviness that women today continue to experience. It is an intersectional exploration of womanhood, with a particular focus on this experience in the context of being a woman of colour and a woman of Islam.

In Chapter Six, I delve more deeply into the grief of violence, particularly the loss of my mother.

In Chapter Seven, some implications of the research and conclusions are offered.

## Chapter 2: Indelible Grief, Cosmopolitanism, and the Curriculum

*“When we want to give expression to a dramatic situation in our lives, we tend to use metaphors of heaviness. We say that something has become a great burden to us. We either bear the burden or fail and go down with it, we struggle with it, win or lose.”*

(Kundera, 1999, p. 64)

### 2.1 Grief in Tradition

Grief is broadly studied, but remains a mystery. Within the world of psychology and psychiatry, grief is understood as both deeply personal and universal; grief is the reaction to loss, but everyone’s grief manifests itself differently (Granek, 2014). Even within my own nuclear family, bound by many similar experiences, and the loss of the same person in the same way, we each grieved so deeply differently that I found it at times impossible to understand the actions and reactions of my family members. It was never clearer than in those first days of mourning how deeply mysterious we all truly are to one another. We were hurting, but our pain greeted us in a cacophony of ways – there existed little symmetry, little harmony in our approaches.

Grief is the reaction to both physical and relational loss (Gross, 2016) including both primary loss (the loss of a person and the resulting loss of their physical company) as well as the secondary loss (the loss of hopes and dreams associated with this person) (Gross, 2016). Over time, grief subsides as the griever begins to accept their loss (Prigerson & Maciejewski, 2008). This belief suggests that acceptance is the end-goal of grief. In the study of grief, we have found ways to break down the experience into many categories, including *complicated*

(Granek, 2014) and *intuitive* or *instrumental* (Gross, 2016). Complicated grief is understood to be grief that lasts longer than should be expected and prevents the griever from normal functioning (Shear & Engl, 2015). Complicated grief most often occurs in parents after the death of a child, following the death of a romantic partner, or after a death as a result of violence (Shear & Engl, 2015). Upon reading this, I wondered if I had complicated grief. How long *should* one grieve the loss of a loved one to violence? Was grieving for a few months too long? A few years? Certainly, grieving for a few decades was pushing it. And yet, perhaps not. Wouldn't I always be horrified that this terrible thing was perpetrated against my mother? Perhaps if we were worse at adapting to violent loss or the death of children, we, as humans, would be more thoughtful about hurting another life. Perhaps if we were like bees and experienced viscerally the self-harm that comes from stinging another, we'd be more careful. My thoughts turned from my own grief to the grief of entire nations of people. Complicated grief must have been experienced by all who experienced or survived their loved ones over the course of the Holocaust. Indeed, a generation or two later, and we are beginning to understand the biological implications of being descended from those who experienced this trauma. The field of epigenetics explores the ways in which trauma can be inherited biologically. PTSD and even nightmares, it seems, are inheritable (Kellermann, 2013), and in the wake of the unimaginable cruelty that over six million Jews experienced, one can only ache for the grief this entire community must feel. And today, we can only imagine how complicated grief must abound in places like Afghanistan and Syria where virtually everyone loves someone who died at the hands of unthinkable, yet somehow enacted, violence.

In the field of mental health, there is a prevailing notion that in order to be healthy, people should conduct ‘grief work’ – a set of loosely defined modes of sharing and communicating feelings as they relate to the experience of grief (Martin & Wang, 2006). Shakespeare encapsulated this widespread belief in *Macbeth* “give sorrow words. The grief that does not speak/ Whispers the o’ergraught heart and bids it to break” (Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, 4.3, lines 209-210). The sense is that grief needs to find ways to become vocalized and communicated, lest it eventually cause heartbreak for the griever. Intuitive grief is characterized by this level of openness and communication. Intuitive grievers give their sorrow words and tears and share these feelings freely. Instrumental grief, on the other hand, resides in the cognitive experience of grief, finding ways to intellectualize their feelings. Most people, it is believed, fall into the category of *blended grief* – that is, somewhere in between intuitive and instrumental grief (Gross, 2016). Ultimately, no two intuitive grievers have the same experience, nor can two instrumental grievers. Categories become useful in the study of grief, but less so when experiencing it.

Grief is expressed differently across cultures. In the Shi’a Ismaili tradition, the tradition in which my mother passed, mourners are given 40 days to formally grieve their loss. In these days, the mourners are expected to attend evening prayers each day, though there’s never any compulsion in these traditions. There was a sense of compulsion within my family in part, perhaps, because the profile of our loss was heightened within our community. Everyone was shocked. I had a sense that people were watching us – looking out for us, sure, but also observing our strength of faith in dark times, drawing their own faith from it. I think getting out of the house and seeing other faces was, on the whole, good for us. It became less good when someone approached me and asked “so, they just shot her?”

and having avoided reading the news reports, and not having even seen her body yet, this was a question I could not answer. “I’m not sure, aunty” (she wasn’t my aunt, this is just a term of respect for our elders). After reading the news, my answer was still the same when another gentleman approached me with the same question some time later.

In the Islamic tradition, grieving has an important role as death is an experience that unites all people. As with many aspects of faith in general, and Islam in particular, there is a gendered history to grief. In pre-Islamic times in the Arabian Peninsula where Islam was founded, women played an important role in navigating grief. Primarily, women performed ritual wailing in the wake of death, ushering the deceased out of this world. With the arrival of Islam, as was the case with Christianity centuries earlier, the notion that the end of a person’s life on earth was simply the beginning of her life in the hereafter meant that the devastation of grief should be tempered (El Cheikh, 2015). That is, “strong emotional reaction to death was condemned by religious pronouncement because it implied a skeptical attitude toward the divine promise of eternal life and a preference for earthly values” (El Cheikh, p. 42). It was in this transition from overt mourning and wailing to a more muted experience of grief that a woman’s voice, previously the authority of lamentation, was eliminated and replaced by the male voice. What emerged was the male-led and attended ceremonies which became the official ceremonies, and the unofficial, more traditional ceremonies performed and attended by women. These modes of mourning translated themselves, centuries later, into my mother’s funeral when, following the prayer ceremonies, her body was taken out of the hall by the men of my family and community to the cemetery, while I, my sister, and the other women in attendance were left to gather. We didn’t wail, I

think I just cried for an hour and then my sister and I went home and lay under a blanket in our living room while the men were out burying my mother. Officially.

Other cultures express their grief and funeral rites through a variety of means. Studies of these practices have tiptoed along the line of cultural voyeurism, particularly with descriptions of cannibalism that were used to justify enslavement under Spanish rule in the 1500s (Conklin, 2001). I suppose there is some sense to eating one's dead when I think about being consumed by grief and consuming grief in equal parts.

In the course of human study, we have separated grief into experiences in our bodies, minds, spirits, and behaviours (Lewis, 2009; Barnes, 2013). We have tried to identify the stages of grief: whether we land on four stages (Bowlby & Parkes, 1970), five (Kübler-Ross, 1969), six (Rando, 1993) or nine (Ramsay & de Groot, 1977) remains undecided, but generally the concept of the stages of grief renders us trapped in the rigidity of inputs and outputs. The grief of loss (whether it is loss of a loved one or the knowledge that death is near) is the input while the outputs are denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and, eventually that beautiful Mecca of peace: acceptance. If even in the context of counselling, psychologists understand that people may move from one stage of grief to another in and out of order, the Social Engineering input/output model of grief is much like the notion of social engineering in the classroom, assuming that

education is like an automobile engine: if only we make the right adjustments— in teaching, in learning, in assessment— it will hum, transport us to our destination, the promised land of high test scores, or, for many of us on the educational Left, a truly democratic society (Pinar, 2015, p. 12).

I had told myself: if only I could care for my mind, body, and spirit, and express my feelings openly, somehow then, my grief machine would hum and I would be back to 'normal.'



## 2.2 Grief and Curriculum Studies

The inability of, yet the undying desire for, social engineering is an entry point for curriculum studies and grief to begin a dialogue with one another. Education is all too often thought of in the vein of if/then statements: if I teach cosmopolitanism like this, then a more peaceful coexistence will be achieved. If only that magic formula existed. So-called grief work also felt this way to me – if I do enough of the work, then I will bounce back. Indeed, my research for a long time, and my grief work both sought particular outcomes: a more peaceful world; a more resilient me.

Resilience has been theorized as the ability to “bounce back” after an adverse experience (Smith, Tooley, Christopher & Kay, 2010). Many see resilience as a positive approach to mental health, a field that has long been plagued with a deficit model (Windle, 2011, p. 152), a reality to which scholars in the field of curriculum studies can relate. In the deficit approach, there is a notion of the ideal: the perfect student, or the person who is perfectly mentally healthy. The deficits emerge when real students are compared to the mythical perfect student, or real people are compared to the mythical perfectly mentally healthy person. The real people become perfectly healthy *except...* just as the students become perfect *except*. Though resilience has been defined broadly as the ability to thrive despite a challenging environment, embedded in its etymology is the idea of *resilientia*, or the “fact of avoiding” (“Resilience,” 2016) and “recoil” (“Resilience,” 2016). Resilience, then, is about finding your way back to an original shape, state, or way of being. The perfect response to trauma is resilience. To not recoil to an original shape is to land in the world of *except*.

Recoil.

I saw this word on the page and immediately thought of the mechanics of a gun. Recoil is the description of the equal force that pushes back against a gun when a bullet is shot forward. Momentum has moved in both directions equally. In a physical sense balance is achieved and everything bounces back to its original state. Recoil. It takes into account the balance of momentum, but not the one thing has changed: there is another bullet tearing through our universe. It is running its own course to which there is no end.

Perhaps I have not yet fully rid myself of the desire to produce outcomes, although I realize the impossibility of the task. Certainly, in carefully contained domains outcomes can be produced, but the control of chance, of human imagination and willfulness, makes outcomes in education – in any nuanced subjective sense – impossible, and the effort to do so ethically reprehensible. Perhaps, even more important than the notion of impossibility, is the danger that arises from this desire: it is a resistance to deviation from the expected outcomes, and the expectation of conformity. My grief-work outcomes made me feel like a deviant in some way: I haven't bounced back to the person I was before my mother was killed, so is there something wrong with me? Our curricular demands can similarly make students feel deviant when they don't leave the classroom thinking the way their teacher – or the author of their curriculum - thinks.

### **2.2.1 What is Curriculum Studies?**

In 1918, Franklin Bobbitt wrote on the role of the scientific method in curriculum studies, making the argument that education was lagging behind social developments, that it was not keeping pace with “civilization and humanization” (Bobbitt, 1918, p. 9). This is an argument that continues to be asserted, almost a century later (Schleicher, 2010). Bobbitt

suggested that the learning of facts was not enough for the education of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. We continue to make this argument today, perhaps particularly in the context of 21<sup>st</sup> century education. The assertion is that we are not educating our students with the knowledge that is “of the most worth” (Spencer, 1884, p. 5).

The question of the curriculum being made up of the knowledge that is of the most worth has been *the* question of curriculum studies and education more broadly, since its inception. It is a problematic question, as Herbert Spencer recognized in his 1884 article. He argues that worthiness is determined by many factors, often, not least of which is the desire to subjugate others, whether it is a power the state holds over its subjects, or at the interpersonal level. At the time of Spencer’s writing the question of worthiness is one that led to the education of women to be dictated primarily by idea of what was considered ladylike, not for the betterment of each individual woman, but for the subjugation of others; in a sense, to ‘win’ at ladylikeness, causing others to ‘lose’. Worthiness in this case, was a question of extrinsic utility, and for Spencer structured by Social Darwinism. This tension of worthiness as the quiet “unfolding [of] our own individualities to the full in all directions” (Spencer, 1884, p. 10) and the extrinsic utility and effects on others, has long existed. Though the debate is not overt, it can be witnessed in the conversation surrounding education in policy and, indeed, in the behaviour of parents who seem to believe that their child’s success is determined by things like elite university admissions; it is a kind of ‘winning’ in education that causes some others to ‘lose’. As a graduate of Brown University, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and – hopefully – the University of British Columbia, I am no stranger to the notion of elitism, education, and the assertion of dominance in the mere

association of these institutions, not to mention the effort to receive a doctorate in a particular field.

The question remains: what *is* curriculum? As Ted Aoki (1978) asserts, “the term *curriculum* is many things to many people” (p. 94). In his argument, Aoki (1978) suggests that curriculum has been ‘centered’ on many different premises, including: teacher centered curriculum, student centered curriculum, discipline centered curriculum, and society centered curriculum. These centers suggest that each curriculum is placing a greater worth on certain kinds of knowledge: the knowledge that is narrated by teachers, or the knowledge that is produced in student construction, for example. Aoki’s contributions to the field of curriculum studies are numerous, but their meaning to me is his transformation of these centers to the center of what he terms man/world relationships, which he describes as a way of considering curriculum that “permits probing of the deeper meaning of what it is for persons (teachers and students) to be human, to become more human, and to act humanly in educational situations” (Aoki, 1978, p. 95). Aoki’s fundamental approach to the worthiness of curriculum is one that is premised on an individual’s relationship to the self and the other. He rejects a curriculum of *work* and *control*. Doll (2014) explores the hold that notions of control have in curriculum development and delivery. However, Doll attempts to recoup control from its top-down approach to a sense of control that emerges from change, and is control that emerges from complexity theory. It is, as he admits, “oxymoronic in that it is control which depends on change” (Doll, 2014, p. 296), and, in a sense, whatever attempts we make to redefine this idea will remain somewhat elusive based on the deeply rooted notions of regulation that are embedded in the word *control* (Control, 2017). Aoki further rejects a curriculum approach of *communication* which he defines as a situational interpretive approach to curriculum.

Instead, he names his approach the Critically Reflective Inquiry Orientation, premised on *reflection*. The purpose of reflection is to shake us out of our daily routines and find ourselves wrestling with questions that pose new opportunities for reflection, as a cycle, and “by rendering transparent tacit assumptions and hidden assumptions” Aoki (1978) suggests that we may initiate “a process of transformation designed to liberate man” (Aoki, 1978, p. 100). The knowledge that is of most worth in a reflective curriculum, then, is that which liberates us.

Gert Biesta (2014) also poses the fundamental question of education as a choice between “education that aims to produce and domesticate and education that aims to open up and liberate” (p. 14), a choice that he suggests reflects our ideas of a society or culture of capitalism or a culture of humanities. Curriculum, then, is an avenue through which we may become domesticated or liberated in varying levels. In curriculum studies, the concept of *bildung* has been long philosophized in the German tradition as a concept of “self-formation” or “self-cultivation.” Throughout history, the concept of *bildung* has evolved to imply at various points more strongly a connection to mystical development, democracy and politics, bourgeois culture, aesthetics, and once again in recent years, a reaffirmed political connection (Pinar, 2011, p. 67). To David Jardine, *bildung* is the center of the hermeneutic approach to education as “it is a process of *becoming* someone, a process that is undergone, endured, or ‘suffered’ in the act of coming to know about oneself and the world” (Jardine, 2015a, p. 3). In many ways, the notion of *bildung* is powerful in its openness to *self-cultivation*, that is, being open to the journey that each individual takes towards their own personal edification. In this conception of *bildung*, education is ever an incomplete project.

Ultimately, Biesta (2014) does not see *bildung*-as-cultivation as an adequate understanding of the role of education. In the term cultivation, from an agricultural standpoint, we can observe a success in cultivation: a seed grows into a plant that yields flower and fruit. *Bildung*, to Biesta, has embedded in its very notion of cultivation the idea of reaching some kind of ideal, that is, some blossoming, whether explicitly stated or not. A seed that is cultivated does not become a lamp or any other *thing*: a cultivated seed becomes a thriving plant. In its implication, *bildung*, then, mirrors the relationship Emmanuel Levinas offers to the notion of humanism. Specifically, that “humanism has to be denounced... because it is not sufficiently human” (Levinas, 1981, p. 128). That is, humanism sets some form or shape to defining what it is to be human, and those who do not meet the criteria are excluded as sub-human. In a similar manner, the danger of *bildung*, as with any idea that ostensibly seeks to attain a particular goal, is its subtle ability to include and exclude people based on attainment of that goal: those who are cultivated count, those who are not become expendable.

William Pinar (2015) in turn recognizes that self-formation is not self-cultivation in the sense of pushing the notion of cultivation in becoming something in particular. He ties this to the notion of study that finds its motivation in the inner life of the student:

Self- formation specifies no “standards” or “best practices,” as the paths of study are numerous. Study follows not from uncritical compliance with instructions, but from an aspiration to assert “control” over the shifting conjunctions between self and circumstances. While I disclaim the aspiration for “control,” I embrace study’s capacity to contest conformity (Pinar, 2015, p. 13).

Tying the push against cultivation in education to the importance of avoiding the desire for social engineering is an important contribution to curriculum studies. Even when those of us

in the field speak of self-cultivation, we may still be speaking about social engineering. Through study, Pinar leaves room for the subjective self to shine. Study in the context of grief has a power to transform. It “may not precisely relieve the suffering we will inevitably face, but it can change its nature” (Jardine, 2015, p. 231). Study creates space for grief, not to necessarily lighten its load, but certainly, to transform it from a burden to something *more*. For Pinar, that subjective expansion becomes the mark of a cosmopolitan education in which we may house within the self both our own as well as others’ alterities.

Pinar weaves the thread of subjectivity into his work in exploring the question, ‘what *is* curriculum?’ *Currere* – the Latin verb form of curriculum, “to run the course” – is the name of a concept that William Pinar introduced to curriculum studies in the 1970s. It created space for the lived curriculum, the life experiences that teach us, to take flight in the field of curriculum studies. Pinar chose the verb form of the word as a means of emphasizing the active process of engaging in curriculum, what he defines as a “complicated conversation” (Pinar, 2011, p. 1). In Pinar’s (1975) introduction to the method of *currere*, he outlines the *regressive, progressive, analytical and synthetical* steps to run the course as a means of guiding the autobiographical exploration of self. In the regressive stage, the student considers past experiences that have influenced her in her life. The progressive stage is a contemplation of the goals of the student in the future – how does the student imagine her life to unfold? In the analytical stage, the student is asked to consider the biographic present, inclusive only of present responses to past experiences and future hopes. Finally, the synthesis is the stage in which all is brought together – the physical body, the intellect, the spirit; past, present, future. Over time, Pinar’s approach to *currere* has evolved to emphasize

more strongly the engagement with a variety of Others, an exploration of the person/world relationship:

The running of the course – *currere* – occurs through conversation, not only classroom discourse, but also dialogue among specific students and teachers and within oneself in solitude. Because the running of the course occurs socially and subjectively through academic study, the concept of *currere* forefronts the meaning of the curriculum as complicated conversation encouraging educational experience (Pinar, 2011, pp. 1 – 2).

The power of *currere* lies in its ability to delve into the inner life of each individual running the course. It draws out of the shadows the complex lives we each lead, marrying our educative lives with our political lives, social lives, professional lives, and intimate lives that are not neatly separated but are, in truth, one and the same life.

Curriculum studies, as “many things to many people” (Aoki, 1978, p. 94) is a running of the course. It is not only about the document called a “curriculum” that dictates facts to be memorized and is possible to script (as has been done in certain states in the United States). It is more than a document, it is a “complicated conversation” (Pinar, 2011, p. 1) that is impossible to script because it is dependent on the subjective selves of those engaged in the conversation. It is more than a cultivation of the self as theorized in the *bildung* movement. It is more because we cannot be cultivated without having a desired outcome for that cultivation. Curriculum instead, can become a path to liberation as it is a path of reflection. A path that quietly urges us to dwell in the spaces that are “both this and that, and more” (Aoki, 1993, p. 295).



### 2.2.2 Curriculum Studies and Grief

The concept of *currere* enables us to bridge the deeply personal nature of grief with the universal inevitability of encountering grief. As Aoki (1996) suggests, “bridges lure us to linger,” (p. 316) and it is in grief that we are invited to linger in the space between self and other. To Aoki (1991) bridges connect two worlds and it could be argued that the self and the other do not inhabit two worlds, but one. In thinking of the bridge as the world of ‘and,’ Aoki (1991) asks of the bridge between curriculum and assessment, “what understandings of the word *curriculum* are erased?” (p. 259) and “which understanding of assessment is allowed?” (p. 259). Similarly, on the bridge of *and* between self and other, we find ourselves lingering between a multiplicity of definitions, able to absorb the complexity of both sides of bridge, and recognize the interplay of these worlds. Crossing the bridge is, in a sense, an act of prayer, which will be explored in more depth in the next chapter. It is in this frame of thinking that we consider that the engagement with the other is not always the stranger beyond the self, but can be an engagement with estrangement from the self (Wang, 2004). Just as curriculum is an ever-lasting journey of becoming, home, according to Wang (2004) is ever-created, even within one’s most intimate relationships, including with oneself. Becoming a stranger is becoming Other, even to myself. There is benefit to becoming other to oneself.

In grief, I became a stranger to myself. Home was both nowhere and everywhere at the same time – my mother was gone, and yet, I saw her in everything. Grief becomes a curriculum as an experience and as a state of being that is, as life, a course to be run, with no particular goal to achieve (when ‘bouncing back’ is not considered an appropriate goal of

grief as described earlier). Grief introduces us again to the stranger, asking us questions that make us uncomfortable, that create a sense of estrangement from home.

To Jacques Derrida (2000), there is a role for the stranger in our education: to pose questions; a role that is similar to the notion of *reflection* that emerges in Aoki's (1978) work. Citing Plato's dialogues, Derrida suggests that the stranger is the one who both challenges the authority of the paternal *logos* or reasoning to enable critical thought, but who also threatens that authority with parricide (Derrida, 2000). In the context of public life, the stranger is held in balance between the object of difference and the object of too much difference; one who receives hospitality and one who receives suspicion. In the context of the inner life, becoming a stranger to oneself can pose questions that draws the individual from the world of routine, and sometimes those questions can, in a sense, assassinate the self that was; *home* remains an ever-changing state of being. Pinar (2011) argues that "*leaving in order to return home: this is, I submit, the educational potential of academic study as lived experience, curriculum as currere*" (p. 106). Indeed, this calls into the educational experience of being a stranger. It is through this experience of strangeness that we can explore and embody the hospitality espoused by Derrida (2000).

Strangeness is not the only experience that enlivens an experience of grief. Indeed, in the hermeneutic tradition, an important aspect of the theory of experience itself is "that there is something unavoidably difficult, and transformative, in the act of becoming experienced in the ways of the world" (Jardine, McCaffrey & Gilham, 2015, p. 3). In this statement, Jardine is speaking of the pedagogy of suffering, and the ways in which suffering is the fundamental reality of experiences that "[extend] across the whole gamut of human life" (Jardine, McCaffrey & Gilham, 2015, p. 3). The notion of suffering as a means of learning harkens

back to the idea of Greek tragedies of *pathei mathos*, that is, “learning through suffering” (Jardine, McCaffrey & Gilham, 2015, p. 3). It is not a new idea, and yet, when considering the role of grief in pedagogical practices, I have met some resistance that turning towards the heaviness may make the burden of carrying it even more difficult to bear. I have been asked, in classrooms, in life, if we turn towards grief, are we not risking being engulfed in darkness?

In my time working with schools in Afghanistan, it has become clear that turning away from that which grieves us is just a way of making teachers and administrators comfortable. Choosing to ignore the darkness does not offer our students, whose lives are imminently affected by grief on a daily basis, to exist as full beings in our schools. As Claudia Eppert (2010) describes, we have an ethical and spiritual responsibility to children to create space for their darkness and their heaviness, to exist in these times. This is both a question of pedagogy, as Jardine and Eppert engage in their work, as well as a question of curriculum. It is just as much a *way* of running the course as it is the course itself. What this dissertation seeks to add to this conversation is not only the ways in which teachers and students can engage with the conversation of grief, but how grief can contribute to the curriculum, and in turn, transform the experience of grief.

### **2.2.3 Cosmopolitanism: Curriculum Ghosts**

When the news of my mother’s passing reached me, I was in the midst of reading William Doll’s piece “Ghosts and the Curriculum” (2002) in which he describes the history of the word and concept of curriculum. Incredibly, early on in the field of curriculum studies, there was no notion of being “finished” (Doll, 2002, p. 30) in an educational context, but over the course of time, the need for control became central to curriculum. Running the

course – the translation of the Latin *curriculum* - became a set course, set out in stages, not unlike our conception of grief. As Doll (2002) stated:

Control is not only the mechanical ghost in the curriculum clock – to use a modern, mechanistic metaphor – but is also the force which actually runs the clock as its pendulum swings from one ideology or fad to another. It is time to put this ghost to rest, to let it retire peacefully to the “Land of No Return” and to liberate curriculum to live a sprightly life of its own (p. 34).

It took me almost two years to return to this piece of writing, and find the wisdom of Doll’s words come rushing at me, almost like a direct admonition: there is no finish line in running the course of life. Curriculum and grief do not need to be controlled. Let the ghosts rest.

And yet, there were other ghosts that lingered at curriculum’s doorstep.

Most of the history I learned in school was the history of men and the intellectual traditions of the West. It is perhaps thanks to this blindness in the curriculum to the achievements of women in the West and the achievements of people outside of the West that led to the Republican Representative from Iowa, Steve King, say: “I'd ask you to go back through history and figure out, where are these contributions that have been made by these other categories of people that you're talking about, where did any other subgroup of people contribute more to civilization?” (Bump, 2016). By “subgroups” King meant nonwhite people (Bump, 2016). That a public official can demonstrate such ignorance is both embarrassing and worrying. Sadly, our curricula in schools focus primarily on the celebration of contributions of Western scholars. Indeed, the curriculum holds a kind of power over its students and the teachers who are asked to teach it. It is a power that determines if a student sees herself in the curriculum, if her life and history is represented. The curriculum determines

whose knowledge and whose potential is encouraged, valued and validated? Whose knowledge is ignored, devalued, relegated to footnotes, and/or erased? Whose life chances and potential is stifled? Whose spirit is broken, mended, and healed? Who lives and who dies? (DePass, 2008, p. 22).

And yet, perhaps it is less a question of who lives and who dies, but more a question of who exists at all. In my education, women barely existed, and when they did, they were virtually never women of colour. It was not the killing off of women of colour, but a denial of existence, ghosts never given the chance at life. This is more fundamental than murder, it is invisibility. It starts in the curriculum of our schools, and extends beyond to the course we run through life. We become ghosts haunting the 'real world,' and as such, we move through this world always struggling to be heard, to be recognized, to be *counted*. This is not an argument for identity politics, but rather an acknowledgement of a severe lack of exploration of other worlds of knowledge and wisdom, a blindness that is seeping its way into our politics and into the way in which people are treated. We are susceptible to different forms of phobias because we start from a place of ignorance. We are susceptible to the mistreatment of others because we don't even know they exist as more than caricatures in our imaginations.

It is something I have struggled with throughout my education, well into my doctoral studies. In an effort to validate the very existence of an Islamic culture in the West, I, like many other North American and European Muslims, went on a hunt for the intellectual roots of Western ideas in Muslim societies. I found such validation in the story of *Hayy Ibn Yaqzan* (Ibn Tufayl and Goodman, 1185/1972) an early and widely read novel of a boy born on an isolated island in the Indian Ocean. Written by Ibn Tufayl, an Arab polymath born near Granada, *Hayy Ibn Yaqzan* was a *bildungsroman* before we had the name for it, and was

widely read across Europe and thought to be a precursor to such works as Jean Jacques Rousseau's (Rousseau & Foxley, 1762/1928) *Emile* and Rudyard Kipling's (1894) *The Jungle Book*. My exploration of the *bildungsroman* was an exercise in proving my historical worth in a particular cultural context, as a Muslim in the West, a form of my grief in the face of the ever-growing Islamophobia. It isn't that thinkers from the East aren't welcomed into curriculum studies. But they're also not particularly mainstream.

This, to me, is where cosmopolitanism fails. The word cosmopolitanism is derived from Greek, as a compound from the words *cosmo* that we can understand as the world or the universe, and bears the philosophy that the cosmos offers a sense of harmony and order that directs our universe. *Polis*, takes the macro concept of the cosmos and draws its worldliness into the city state, striving still for its ideal form. Jacques Derrida (1997) rests himself comfortably in the notion of cosmopolitanism existing in the concept of the city, suggesting that our "ultimate ambition, what gives meaning to our project [is the] 'city of refuge'" (Derrida, 1997, p. 8). Thinking of cosmopolitanism as the 'city of refuge' or perhaps, indeed, even as a space for those seeking refuge may indeed find hospitality, reflects Emmanuel Kant's theory of cosmopolitanism, often cited as the "philosophical origin of modern cosmopolitan thought" (Fine, 2003, p. 609). Not so incidentally, notions of cosmopolitan thought have existed in societies well before Kant was conceived, let alone forming coherent philosophical statements on the matter. Kant's stance is heavily grounded in the notion of the state, approaching "perpetual peace" from the perspective of international relations, a reality that makes sense for the time in which he was writing, but, given the structure of violence, war, and prejudice that plagues our world today, may no longer be relevant. Perhaps, though, schools could be the states of perpetual peace. It is wishful thinking.

One of the ghosts of cosmopolitan thought includes the Islamic tradition, certainly. As I have described elsewhere (Thomas, 2015), from the outset, Islam was established with an ethic of diversity. The verse of the Qur'an, "The Table Spread" (*al-Ma'ida*), offers a direct message on not only the respect that must be afforded to people of different beliefs and backgrounds, but the divine *choice* and *intention* to create difference:

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)

The Beloved, as I will name God in this dissertation, not only admonishes the faithful in Islam to accept diversity – and even celebrate it – but also recognizes that diversity is a *challenge*. The Beloved here tells the faithful that it requires effort to be hospitable to another, to accept the stranger. But, this is a fundamental passage of guidance from the divine and is the seed from which cosmopolitan thought bloomed in the Islamic tradition. In particular, it was a lesson that "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). The Beloved in Islam has 99 names. Diversity, and the dwelling of these diverse elements together, is the ethic of Islam itself. If one deity can hold so many names, humanity, in our multitudes can certainly recognize that our unity in diversity is a possible and important ethic.

More recent scholars have tackled the question of cosmopolitanism from a variety of lenses and perspectives, reimagining the modern *polis* as our shared planet (Bruno-Jofré & Johnston, 2014). David Held (2010), grounded in the cosmopolitanism of Kant, suggests the

notion of *layered cosmopolitanism*, that is a cosmopolitanism that does not suggest a hierarchy of cultural values or lifestyles, and indeed recognizes “a diversity of moral conceptions of the good” (Held, 2013, pp. 18 - 19) while maintaining the basic ethic that all can lead their lives as they wish so long as harm is not brought upon others. This is a disengaged cosmopolitanism as compared to the cosmopolitanism of Kwame Anthony Appiah (2010) who suggests that “every human being has obligations to every other” (Appiah, 2010, pp. 166 – 167). I have argued that these obligations entail the Sufi notions of *hilm* and *ilm*, loosely understood as ‘grace’ and ‘intellect,’ born largely of the experience of suffering and forgiveness (Thomas, 2015). It is through recognizing our universal experience of suffering and our universal need for forgiveness that, I argue, cosmopolitanism can begin to be realized (Thomas, 2015).

Enacting cosmopolitanism demands that it is a value that is present in the curriculum we teach in schools. Cosmopolitanism in the curriculum requires us to really believe in it – to the point of consciously reflecting on our curricular realities and making changes where they are needed. Cosmopolitanism requires of us to reanimate the canon, allowing the ghosts to live once again. As Pinar (2015) argues:

The canonical curriculum question—what knowledge is of most worth?—cannot be answered definitively—that is in part why it is an ongoing pedagogic provocation—but in remembrance knowledge matters. Knowledge cannot be replaced with a skill set standardized tests measure and the “global marketplace” presumably employs. In retrospect, it is painfully clear that our progressive predecessors were too eager to replace knowledge as the center of the curriculum. Knowledge enables remembrance and the reactivation of the past (Pinar, 2015, p. 181).

Cosmopolitanism, like its “canonical curriculum” counterpart, is an “ongoing pedagogic provocation,” that can be illuminated through study, self-formation, and the development of



knowledge. In making a *cosmopolitan* knowledge the center of curriculum, we are all asked to remember the past, instead of The Past we have been taught to date. A cosmopolitan curriculum is “the study of knowledge that transfigures the one and the other” (Pinar, 2009, p. 27), that gives life to the ghosts who haunt our curriculum today: those who have not existed in our curriculum. It is not enough to approach the study of these ghosts from our own perspectives, because these perspectives render the ghosts unimportant and it becomes a perpetuation of the status quo. Instead, by giving voice to the grief of the ghosts, we may begin to understand history differently, in a more nuanced way, as may be understood in Chapter Three in relation to the Alhambra.

### **2.3 Grief: Heaviness and Privilege**

Grief in a curricular context is not a series of stages to pass through on an eventual road to recovery in which we rebound to an original shape. Grief in a curricular context becomes a teacher, posing questions, and at times answering questions, along a path to a transfigured self. Grief is the friend with whom we hold this complicated conversation, in fits and starts, throughout life.

In the use of language, *grief* and *bereavement* are often used interchangeably. Bereavement is about what is stolen from us in our grief: it is about loss. Bereavement is the word we use when we describe grief as the loss of a limb, as Madeliene L’Engle did following the death of her husband in saying “the death of a beloved is an amputation” (2009, vi). The etymology of bereavement offers the depth of loss: *reave* finds its roots in Germanic, Dutch and Saxon terms to mean “to plunder, despoil, rob, steal” and even in the

Sanskrit *rúpyati* which means “hurts badly” (“Bereavement”, 2016). Bereavement then is truly about loss; loss that wounds us deeply, loss that steals away that which we love.

But this is not the meaning of grief. Grief is about heaviness. To grieve something is to make it heavy, to press heavily upon it, to burden it. It is to be hurtful and harmful. It is to cause bodily discomfort and pain. It is to affect with deep sorrow. It is to make angry. To provoke to anger or resentment. To incense, offend. To sorrow deeply. It is to regret deeply. In bereavement, something is lost, but in grief, something is added, present. It is no wonder, then, that grief is complicated, even when it is not diagnosed formally as Complicated Grief. It is an emotional word. It is a bodily word. It is a word that holds the worlds of regret and anger, offense and hurt. It is so heavy that these sensations are felt deep within us. Grief lands upon our skin and immediately permeates it with heaviness, nestling itself into our thoughts, our muscles, our hearts, our lungs, our bones. “Like a row of small islands in a vast sea, a language’s emotion words stand for a complex of feelings that people experience in the deepest recesses of their bodies and minds” (Reilly, 2012, p. 145). Grief is one such emotion word for us in the English-speaking world. Even the word gravity, which explains the pull of the earth upon each of us, finds its origins in the same notions as grief. That heaviness, the weight of the world acting upon us, is the curricular grief.

In the case of grief of a beloved’s death, some of this weight arises from the idea of the dead living on through the living. It was a recurring question for C.S. Lewis (2009) in his journal following this death of his wife, who he refers to as “H.” in his writing:

I begin to see that ‘respect for the wishes of the dead’ is a trap. Yesterday I stopped myself only in time from saying about some trifle ‘H. wouldn’t have liked that.’ This is unfair to the others. I should soon be using ‘what H. would have liked’ as an instrument of

domestic tyranny, with her supposed likings becoming a thinner and thinner disguise for my own (Lewis, 2009, pp 8 – 9).

I laughed to myself when I read this. It is perhaps uncountable the number of times I or other members of our family invoked what “Mum would have wanted” in the days and weeks following her death. Mum was, in her life, more than comfortable to share her feelings openly with the rest of us, so in some ways it wasn’t impossible to surmise what she would have wanted. And yet, we had never known her in a situation following the violent loss of a loved one. Perhaps what was black and white for her during her life would have become grey in that situation, as it did so quickly for me.

Derrida deals intimately with the question of the burden of the living following a beloved’s death. Following the death of his friend Roland Barthes, Derrida (2001) writes:

I was searching *like him*, as him, for in the situation in which I have been writing since his death, a certain mimetism is at once a duty (to take him into oneself, to identify with him in order to let him speak within oneself, to make him present and faithfully to represent him) and the worst of temptations, the most indecent and most murderous. The gift *and* the revocation of the gift, just try to choose (Derrida, 2001, p. 38).

The heaviness comes from the choice of living as oneself and permitting another to live on through me. The weight of the world comes from recognizing that those who have gone before us may speak through us still in moments. The weight of the world comes from recognizing the thinness of our arguments for who the dead would have been if they were still with us today. The tragedy of death is the end of a person’s journey – the question of their own subject is no longer posed and answered intimately within themselves. Their subjectivity becomes a question and an answer within those who loved them, and those who did not. It is a question for those who remain.

The loss of a loved one is necessarily a physical loss. In the way that a beloved can continue to live on within the being of another, albeit changed, and stressed in this mode of being, the ideas, the conversations, the thoughts they had during their lifetime, can, in many ways, live on imperfectly. What does not live on imperfectly or otherwise is the physical presence of the beloved. Her body. The physical loss of my mother's embodied self is something I'll probably never stop missing.

Grief is not only the heaviness that arrives in the wake of losing a beloved. A few weeks after my mother was killed, I found myself consoling a friend who was in the midst of a breakup with her boyfriend. Though from the outside, these two events seemed not to warrant comparison, it quickly became clear to me that her sense of loss was acute. She had to mourn, and she was consumed by her mourning as well. Months later, it occurred to me that I have been experiencing a prolonged grief for Islam in a time of Islamophobia, compounded ever more by the complicated web of religion, politics, and trauma that led young Afghan boys to kill my mother. Throughout my life, it has become increasingly complicated to *be* Muslim, perhaps particularly, a Muslim *woman* living periodically in Canada and the United States.

As a woman, as a Muslim, the heaviness of grief lands not through the weight of holding a deceased loved one's life within me, but instead of *being* other externally and internally. As a woman, Simone de Beauvoir (1949/2009) writes, "she is determined and differentiated in relation to man, while he is not in relation to her; she is the inessential in front of the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute. She is the Other" (p. 26). While de Beauvoir's work is not timeless in every sense, the ontological struggle to liberate the subject of the woman remains relevant and necessary today (Kristeva, 2011). Woman

remains the Other. We are greeted by strangeness, away from home in our language, systems, even in our architecture. The burden of struggling for this liberation is the grief of womanhood, a heaviness that is further explored in Chapter Four.

Similarly, Islam has been given the status of always being Other to the Western world, the society in which I live, the society which dictates much of the global and academic conversation today. While the Otherness has, at times, been a beautiful curiosity, within my lifetime, and certainly stretching back into history, Islam has transformed from curiosity to enemy, from beautiful to threatening, in the imagination of many in Europe and North America. The burden today of *being* Muslim is the burden of explanation, apology, of making the world feel comfortable while validating beliefs and, most troublesome, existence. There is a dual burden in Islam today. There is also the grief of witnessing so much destruction being cast in the name of one's faith. I may say that Islam is a religion of peace over and over, but I know that people choose to associate their acts of violence with their faith. It is no different than, in my view, choosing to perform violence in the name of a country, except in this case, it brands all who ascribe to the faith as dangerous Others. Each form of grief presses against me and simultaneously enables me to begin to understand that others experience grief, too. Their grief may be from different sources, but these sources land heavily on each of us.

It was in the context of a conversation with a friend who seems to live a diametrically opposite life from myself that I realized the shared experience of grief may be a more useful opening to the conversation of healing the social inequities that exist than the conversation of privilege. I was in the process of asking him to recognize his privilege as a white man with a graduate degree from a prestigious school when I saw him mentally exit the conversation.

Simply using the word ‘privilege’ seemed to be the equivalent to a verbal slap in the face to him. He began to list the challenges he and his family face, and I realized, *here are the things that weigh heavily against him*. The notion that he is privileged by virtue of being who is weighs heavily against him, heavily enough that he is unable, at least publicly, to admit to privilege.

And then I realized that I, too, was unable to do so.

As Roxanne Gay (2014) explains, “when people wield the word ‘privilege,’ it tends to fall on deaf ears because we hear that word so much it has become white noise” (p.16), but that does not negate the reality that we are each privileged in ways and grieve in other ways. By labeling something as privilege, we do an injustice to the grief people also feel, because it *feels* like we are claiming that a person is wholly privileged. “When we talk about privilege, some people start to play a pointless and dangerous game where they try to mix and match various demographic characteristics to determine who wins at the Game of Privilege” (Gay, 2014, p. 18). Instead of playing this game, I realized that my friend and I could recognize our individual privileges through admitting to the grief we each feel, and making these burdens heard. It wasn’t until I embraced my own grief of being Muslim in *this* place and *this* time that I realized my privilege of not being held to account for my family’s colonial past, all the while being held accountable for the acts of terror that happen in the name of Islam.

## **2.4 Grief and Violence**

If grief is that which presses heavily against us, it is certainly and inextricably tied to violence. Violence is rooted in the word vehemence, which calls forth intensity and the Latin *vehere*, meaning “to carry” (“Violence,” 2016). Violence is not only the physical forces

acting against us, but also that which carries intensity against our bodies, minds, spirits. Our heaviest burdens weigh heavily and intensely upon us.

When I began this research journey, I began in the notion of the ruin. It was a powerful imagery for me, particularly as, so often, my life has taken me to places that hold in their landscapes the memories of trauma, the pain of the past. Though I had spent many summers of my life accompanying my parents to volunteer in Afghan refugee camps in Pakistan, nothing would prepare me for the experience of landing in Kabul for the first time just weeks before I turned 16. The remnants of war were everywhere. Just outside the airport where we landed was what could only be described as a war-machinery graveyard. Tanks and broken airplanes were clustered in a haphazard way. It reminded me of the drawer in our kitchen at home where we would keep papers and other items we didn't think should be thrown away, but we weren't quite sure what to do with them. Kabul's kitchen drawer was scattered with the tools of destruction. Later that week, in the home that became the first location of the Sparks Academies, schools that my mother started, I found a stash of bullets in the corner of the basement. The city, its people, its history, all looked exhausted and weary.

My first trip to Kabul was in 2003, about 18 months after the Taliban lost control of the government. Afghanistan at that time had not had a chance to engage in a public reckoning with the grief of their recent – and continuing – burden of violence. This was not the case on my trip to Bosnia and Herzegovina ten years later. I arrived in Sarajevo almost 20 years after the war had ended, tired from a long day of traveling through London and Zagreb. My hotel was not far from the old town, and so I decided to explore, finding myself wandering the city, admiring the architectural cacophony of socialist apartment blocks

juxtaposed with narrow cobbled streets reminiscent of Renaissance Italian towns, and churches and mosques that seemed to almost roll into one another.: history, seen through architecture.

I was drawn into a *buregdzinica*, a bakery with freshly baked pastries. Food in hand, I decided to take a long route back towards my hotel. As I took my first bite of the warm bread, steaming in the cold air, I saw a red wax-like marking in the sidewalk. Even the vague recollection of what this meant interrupted my romantic meanderings: it was a Sarajevo Rose.

During the almost four-year long siege of Sarajevo between 1992 and 1996, mortars were fired, leaving spattered markings in the pavement. After the war, a decision was made to fill these holes in the sidewalk with red resin, making patterns that look somewhat like flowers (therefore the name, the Sarajevo Rose), though they looked more like blood spatter than anything else. I had a visceral reaction to seeing this: I walked more slowly through the town, carrying a heaviness with me that had not been there before. The Sarajevo Roses are a powerful and intentional form of grief of the lives lost during this painful moment in Bosnia and Herzegovina's history. A similar project has been put in place in Germany where brass cobblestones, *stolperstein* (literally, "stumbling stones"), have been inscribed with the names of victims of Nazi extermination. Usually these are installed at the last known place of residence of the victims. They are reminders. They enable those who pass to carry some of the burden of the grief, in a hopeful way to relieve the burden of those who grieve these losses everyday.

The next day, I arrived in the city of Mostar, where I was greeted by a friend of mine who is the director of an international high school in the city. The school, one of now 17



United World Colleges, seeks to provide high quality education to students from around the world, with a focus on fostering peace and international understanding amongst future leaders (broadly defined) globally. I attended its sister school in Canada. The majority of students at this particular school come from the region around Bosnia and Herzegovina – a large proportion of the students are Bosnian, Serb, and Croat. Mostar was the selected site for this particular school as the city was a major focal point for the conflict in the country – the city itself is divided by a river, one side is predominantly Bosnian, while the other side is predominantly Croat. This border and division has become even more pronounced since the conflict.

My host, a Croat, had moved to Mostar just before the war started. She described turning 21 years old and finding out that a war had begun, surrounded by friends of Bosnian, Serb, and Croat backgrounds. A group of them rejected the conflict, including my host, and instead chose to become part of the relief efforts for refugees. While the work was incredibly serious and dangerous for them all, they did so as clowns, trying to bring some laughter into a situation that she described as “ridiculous and futile.”

Just behind my host’s home, which is along the river, once stood a massive department store. During the war, it had been completely destroyed and as we walked to her home, she gestured towards the enormous ruin in the city’s town square. A passerby, noticing that I was a tourist, inserted herself into our conversation: “look at what our children have to play around... It is a terrible thing they did.”

She walked on, and I wondered if we should all consider it a terrible thing *we* did. Mostar didn’t have an equivalent to the Sarajevo Rose, instead, just enormous buildings including the department store and a hospital, were left, crumbling under the heaviness of the

grief they bore and the violence they barely endured. The old Mostar Bridge connecting the two sides of the river, was restored. It was a poetic way to rebuild.

Though I had visited these places long before my mother was killed, thinking back to my path through these landscapes, I was witnessing a physical metaphor for the loss of my mother. Walking through a town like Mostar and encountering the gaping holes in the city where the department store or the hospital once used to stand could, now looking back on it, easily translate to my grief: I am this city, trying to continue to thrive though pieces of me were ruined. What remains continues to persevere, even if on occasion I stumble on stumbling stone. What remains is also the grief. Even if we have moved on, the grief lasts as an eternal companion. How might we learn from that grief? This is the fundamental question I seek to explore through this dissertation. What do we do with the grief that remains? As Lewis (2009) describes it:

“Grief is like a bomber circling round and dropping its bombs each time the circle brings it overhead; physical pain is like the steady barrage on a trench in World War One, hours of it with no let-up for a moment. Thought is never static; pain often is” (p. 41).

Grief is always present, but noticing the burden of it can sometimes catch us off guard.

Thinking myself as the landscape of these ruined cities has illuminated parts of my grief journey, though the notion of *being* a ruin stung. I was reluctant to agree to this label and maintain this stance. In these cities, recovery does not take on an obvious form of growth; the war was devastating to the people, the economy, and the lives of those who continue to live there. There is a sense of *just* surviving. In these landscapes, I didn't feel that I witnessed a comparable metaphor to my own sense of personal growth through my grief. It was, to me, an imperfect metaphor. The legacy of a ruin can also be nostalgia, but ingrained

in the idea of a ruin is that something *is ruined*. The ruin is fixed in devastation, without hope. I found myself longing for something different, something hopeful. The Mostar United World College seemed to be something different in a city so heavily laden with grief. It has been a ruin, it is now a school, it has been many things throughout its life, and today, in many ways, it is a spectacle, even a palimpsest. It is a place that holds its pain and its beauty simultaneously, in its every corner the echoes of what has happened and what it hopes for, remain. Perhaps, just as Mostar, Sarajevo, and Kabul seem to me to be just surviving, an outsider looking at me would see the same. Perhaps, just as I didn't truly notice the powerful space of growth in the Mostar UWC, others would look at me and only see the struggle. The violence of grief has left its mark.

The violence of grief is not only the physical violence of warfare or murder, and “educationally speaking, violence is multidimensional, much more extensive than a literal understanding of corporal punishment” (Wang, 2010, p. 3). It can also be what Rob Nixon (2011) terms *slow violence*. Slow violence is a term that was coined to refer to those realities in our world that do not call our attention in sensational ways, but are nonetheless guilty of committing violence against our bodies, minds, and very beings. We are not attuned to this violence that is slowly taking hold because of its pace; it is the cataclysmic that happens to the beat of a metronome, extended in time.

Politically and emotionally, different kinds of disaster possess unequal heft. Falling bodies, burning towers, exploding heads, avalanches, volcanoes, and tsunamis have a visceral, eye-catching and page-turning power that tales of slow violence, unfolding over years, decades, even centuries, cannot match. Stories of toxic buildup, massing greenhouse gases, and accelerated species loss due to ravaged habitats are all cataclysmic, but they are scientifically convoluted cataclysms in which casualties are postponed, often for generations (Nixon, 2011, p. 4).

In Nixon's (2011) argument, slow violence is the environmental crisis that we are currently committing against our planet and ourselves, and the burden that is most often levied upon the poor. It is the pollution with which we can just barely live, overtaking our oceans and our air. It is the children who are born with mutations a decade after the Chernobyl and Bhopal disasters, long enough after the initial violence has been committed that it has almost disappeared from public memory (Nixon, 2011). Nixon makes the argument that our tools of war offer visions of precision, and somehow this translates to visions of short-term human violence. Nixon argues we are using depleted uranium in our weaponry, even in our drones and other 'precise' weaponry. Naming our weapons 'precise' offers the public a sense of comfort that innocent people will not be caught in the crossfires of war. While actual numbers of civilians killed in drone strikes are virtually impossible to collect, it is clear that even when civilians are not caught in the crossfire, they may be accidentally targeted as a result of poor intelligence. From the skies, a wedding party looks just as threatening as a military base, a hospital or a school as threatening as a terrorist hotbed of activity. Beyond naming our weapons "precise" and "surgical", the actual name of the weapons, in the case of the most popular drone, the Hellfire Missile, we are somehow rallied behind the idea that those killed by the drone are "enemies" and the drones will "visit Biblical wrath to those on the receiving end" (Byman & Wittes, 2013, v.).

In the Congressional hearing of the victims of unmanned aircraft systems, or drone strikes, the United States House of Representatives heard from the young children of a woman who was killed by a drone strike while carrying out her normal daily activities. As the Karen McVeigh of the *Guardian* newspaper reported it (2013):

"Nobody has ever told me why my mother was targeted that day," [Zubair] Rehman said, through a translator. "Some media outlets reported that the attack was on a car, but there is no road alongside my mother's house. Others reported that the attack was on a house. But the missiles hit a nearby field, not a house. All of them reported that three, four, five militants were killed." Instead, he said, only one person was killed that day: "Not a militant but my mother" (McVeigh, Guardian Newspaper, 2013).

Our supposed precision violence leads to slow violence in the midst of the quickness of war. It is impossible to calculate, mathematically, the toll of war. It is always an algebraic equation with an unknown, and often invisible,  $x$  lingering between the hard numbers we can calculate. The  $x$  remains, and if we were to ponder it, we may realize that it is invaluable: somebody's mother, child, or husband. With the  $x$  as the unknown, the stranger in our precision becomes faceless, nameless, lifeless. As Nixon argues, "the calculus of any conflict needs to at least acknowledge such environmental casualties, even if they cannot be quantified. Such casualties may suffer slow, invisible deaths that don't fit the news cycle at CNN or Fox, but they are war casualties nonetheless" (Nixon, 2011, p. 201). It is not only the physical loss and the environmental toll that exists in the uncalculated  $x$ .

Slow violence is not only an environmental, but cultural reality as well. The toll of war is not only the casualties, those physically killed by the battles or the environmental degradation that ensues. The toll of war is also the loss of mattering in this world. This slow violence, what we can call cultural slow violence, is the paced transition from being witnessed to being no longer visible, from being mourned to being no longer missed, from mattering to not mattering at all. It is the slow violence that strips us of our identities, that shifts our self-understanding from our childhood-celebrated subjectivity to uncomfortable participant to, eventually, a self-loathing shell of what once allowed us to flourish in our

humanity. We are alerted to it, at times, when we watch as Daesh destroys ancient sites of civilization, preserved as part of human history for centuries. We recognized it when the Taliban chose to take dynamite to the Buddha statues in Bamiyan, forcing local residents who had grown up in the valley beneath these sixth century treasures that they loved, to do the deed themselves (Behzad & Qarizadah, 2015). We are reminded of it when white supremacists make use of the Nazi salute. What has been lost in these societies, and in our global society, as a result of these acts, cannot be replaced. And it will require countless generations to heal.

It is slow violence that echoes and reverberates through the work of Ta-Nehisi Coates (2015) in his book *Between the World and Me*. It is an important work that awakens us to the long history of slow violence of racism, specifically against the black body. He begins his discussion of race with the conversation of what it meant to lose his body, a reference to Coates' argument that the black body is one that others use as currency, be it during the time of slavery, or today in the context of police brutality or even the entertainment industry. To Coates (2015), the ultimate question in his life became "how do I live free in this black body?" (p. 11), a question he claims is unanswerable, but important to chase, nonetheless. "The greatest reward of this constant interrogation, of confrontation with the brutality of my country, is that it has freed me from ghosts and girded me against the sheer terror of disembodiment" (p. 13). The fear of disembodiment did not grow within him over night. It was as a result of the slow violence of racism and trauma associated with being a black man. Addressing his son, Coates (2015) writes, "you still believe the injustice was Michael Brown. You have not yet grappled with your own myths and narratives and discovered the plunder

everywhere around us” (p. 21). His son’s grief of the violence against black bodies, he sees, has yet to become fully grown.

The slow violence against black bodies today is rooted in a historical acceptability of hatred and violence against black people, legitimized through every means available to us. From religious studies to scientific inquiry, there exists a culture of racism that has been validated time and again, a concerted effort that makes racism the definition of an ideology. As Ann Winfield (2004) argues, “ideology refers to the part of culture which is actively concerned with the establishment and defense of patterns of belief and value” (pp. 1 – 2). This ideology has embedded itself into our cultural systems and has, the data shows, perpetuated “patterns of belief and value that defined racial and class inequities in terms of heredity and innate ability” (Winfield, 2004, p. 2). As the argument goes, perhaps the African and Atlantic slave trade no longer exists, but incarceration rates of African Americans today suggest that there is still a long way to go before freedom is really achieved for the black American.

The racism towards black people and black bodies is reflected also in the slow violence of anti-Semitism, I would argue, that eventually led to the Holocaust. We can only accept as tolerable the public scorn of an entire group for so long before it becomes an enacted extermination which few will act to prevent. In the case of the Jewish community, anti-Semitism had also developed into an ideology in which scientific inquiry and philosophical, including religious, exploration led Europe to begin to ask itself the “Jewish Question” in the 1700s, and became a point of extensive conversation beginning in the 1770s (Roberston, 1999). The eventual answer to this ostensibly neutral question, was what the Nazis called the “Final Solution” and the general lack of will around the world to welcome

many Jews into more survivable borders (Robertson, 1999). Perhaps, along the almost 250-year journey from formally posing the question to the eventual answer, there may have been a shift in the discourse to divert our history from the path it took. Perhaps we're a few centuries from the final solution to the question of Islam today. It is hard to know for sure, though, history has rarely found its way off the track of socially acceptable hate to socially acceptable murder, even if the journey is a slow one.

Hatred towards women has also historically been so commonplace that still today in America, three women are killed each day by their domestic partners. The hatred grew out of slow violence that de Beauvoir explores in *Second Sex*, recognizing the ways in which women are Othered which limit women's freedom to *be* without man. Woman becomes, then, the "relative being" (de Beauvoir, 2009 p. 26). The luxury of thinking of oneself as natural, as normal, is an enforcement of power and dominance, which de Beauvoir argues men have been doing for centuries, to the point in which women are no longer easily able to think of ourselves independently from in-relation to men. The slow violence manifests itself as self-denial on the part of women, and "it takes great abnegation to refuse to posit oneself as unique and absolute Subject" (de Beauvoir, 2009 p. 34). The power dynamic between men and women, in many ways mirroring that between those who considered themselves white and those they considered black in America has been an experience of "durable inequality" in which experiences of advantage for one group and disadvantage for others endure and compound over time (Tilly, 1998). These experiences of advantage and disadvantage can be, and most often are, subtle – they do not always manifest themselves in physically visible ways, though the threat of actual violence against women remains a salient and troubling matter.



And it is slow violence that has been enacted on the indigenous peoples of North America for hundreds of years since colonizers arrived on this land. In Canada, we conducted the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in order to shed light on the residential school system that stripped indigenous children from their families and imprisoned them in horrible schooling conditions where famine, rape, and abuse were widespread (Truth and Reconciliation Canada, 2015). The official stance of these schools was to ‘civilize’ the children, which translated to the children no longer learning their historic languages, cultural practices, or religions. It was, certainly, a systematic attempt at cultural genocide in the wake of physical genocide and biological genocide enacted on the indigenous peoples of Canada (Truth and Reconciliation Canada, 2015). In systemically making the lives of indigenous peoples matter less than those of others in our communities, we, as a society, create a system of permissibility wherein the life and death of indigenous peoples becomes merely a footnote. This is the grief that the indigenous people of Canada hold. It is the grief that will not go away with an apology or even the changing of systems which must be changed to achieve even a semblance of equality.

## **2.5 Conclusions: Grief as a Path to the Cosmopolitanism Curriculum**

Grief is a complicated conversation, an unwelcome enactment of the curriculum-as-lived. Its heaviness binds the human experience, and manifests itself in many ways across cultures, and, truly, each person experiences grief differently. Though a universal phenomenon, it highlights our individual uniqueness and shared humanity simultaneously. It is an experience that makes us strangers to ourselves, and yet, in some ways, familiar to all others who grieve. The heaviness of grief is wrought by violence. It is not only the violence

done to our bodies, but also the violence committed against our minds, spirits, and cultures. These forms of violence may be noticeable to some, though, slow violence in particular requires attention to observe, let alone to witness. Without attention, it remains an undetected form of violence that eventually comes to fruition, often in the form of murder and destruction, when we are no longer able to prevent it. Understanding grief through curriculum studies is important given the interdisciplinary nature of curriculum studies, as well as the ways in which grief estranges us from ourselves, allowing us to leave in order to return to ourselves.

This research, this exploration of the educative significance of grief to curriculum studies, offers two primary elements. The first is that grief is a powerful avenue through which we can cultivate a curriculum that reanimates its ghosts: those who have been forgotten. To be forgotten is an erasure from existence, and as such, is necessarily a violence. Through grief and the Intimate Dialogue (explored in the next chapter) the curriculum no longer perpetrates this violence.

The second role that grief plays in the curriculum is to offer a path to construct a curriculum of cosmopolitanism. By creating space for grief to flourish in the curriculum, we create a curriculum that actualizes the critical reflective approach of Aoki (1978) that is primarily concerned with the relationship of each individual to the world. Through grief, a cosmopolitan voice flourishes and becomes central to the curriculum. Cosmopolitanism becomes the primary educative experience, it is central, and thus becomes a genuine praxis rather than a theoretical ideal.

### Chapter 3: The Intimate Dialogue: Enacting Cosmopolitanism in Grief

*“When our eyes touch, is day or is it night?”*

I was twelve years old and sharing the front seat of the car with my older sister. Our parents and older brother were sitting, somewhat more comfortably, in the back seat, as our friend and driver pulled up to the gates. We were in Karachi, Pakistan, and though I had been there before, this was the first time I was pulling up to these particular gates. Our driver honked a couple of times gently, which didn't yield immediate enough results, and so seconds later, he was pressing on the horn in full force. The gates opened, and we drove through. The gatekeeper had been expecting us, I suppose.

It was summer time, the air was hot, and I think I was in that awkward somewhere-between teenager and child phase of life, which meant that I was excited about this new experience, but trying to act disinterested, even aloof. The space we drove into unfolded as rows of buildings, makeshift structures, and people huddled under what little shade was available in this mini-city we had just entered.

We were guided towards a small building which consisted of two rooms: one with a desk, and another with a chair and a bed. This was the medical center in one of several refugee camps for Afghans fleeing the Taliban. We had arrived.

This camp, and the four others I visited with my family as my parents conducted their medical camps for the refugee population, became a particular kind of ecotone for me over the course of my teenage years, a formative moment in my life. I spent those summers helping with taking medical histories and doing basic vision tests.

I was born and raised in Vancouver. I grew up in those summers when my parents plucked me and my siblings from our comfortable home surrounded by trees, in the shade of the mountains, glistening in the reflection of the Pacific Ocean, and transplanted us for months at a time to refugee camps blanketed in the dust that Karachi endlessly boasts, and an over-generous sun beating down on us. I cherish those summers.

Many people in the camps quickly became friends. Particularly the other children in the camp, those who were living there, unlike me, who did not have the comfort of a good meal and a bed at the end of the day. Those who lived this reality each day, after the summer was over, and I was once again seated at a desk, pen in hand, a world away from all that was beyond those classroom walls.

That first day, I recall, I tried to remember everything; something had told me in my first moments in the camp that this was a significant moment in my life. There was something macabre about the things I tried to recall. I began to count the number of people we saw who had lost limbs. The specific number eludes me now, but I know that it was in the double-digits by the time I gave up counting. I know that the war ravaged on the people I encountered was palpable in their bodies. Along with their homes and loved ones, they had lost part of themselves. To be witness to that reality is unlike anything else I have experienced in my life.

Death has been described for the grieving as an amputation. We have spent our lives learning to operate and interact with the world in one way, and the loss of a loved one strips us of these capacities. I understand the analogy. I've often felt that this could be true, and that though some may be lost, that somehow I have grown new limbs in the process of grief; limbs I never knew I needed, I never knew I could grow.

While those who have lost limbs cannot regrow new ones in any literal sense, 98 per cent of amputees describe experiencing something called ‘phantom limb syndrome’ in which they continue to feel sensations in the missing limb (Ramachandran and Hirstein, 1998). It is believed that the brain’s pathways and memory of the body, including the missing limb, may be activated through a number of different inputs, including the stimulation of adjacent parts of the brain, and through sight. It is through sight in particular that amputees can find some respite for a phantom sensation. Some experiments have indicated that amputees become somewhat synesthetic. The term synesthesia is derived from the Greek words “*syn* meaning ‘together’ and *aesthesis* meaning ‘sensation’” (Dael, Sierro & Mohr, 2013, p. 3), leading us to synesthesia, the union of the senses. Specifically, senses can be joined such that someone may taste a colour that they see, or smell a particular scent when they see a number. This extends also to an amputee that sees and feels their arm being touched in a reflection such that it looks as though their missing arm is being touched, and can translate this feeling to their amputated arm, relieving phantom pain (Goller, Richards, Novak & Ward, 2013).

But, sight alone can achieve this for many amputees, without the use of reflective touch. For the majority of those whose bodies have been embattled by war, simply seeing someone else touch their own arm is enough to trigger a sense of touch in their phantom limbs. The experience of feeling a tactile response after observing another person being touched is known as mirror-touch synesthesia. And, it seems, we all hold a bit of this capacity in ourselves.

Mirror-touch synesthetes will have a tactile response to witnessing someone else being touched or performing a variety of activities. For example, some mirror-touch synesthetes report the sensation of being squeezed when watching two people hug (Miller &

Spiegel, 2015). While those who do not have mirror-touch synesthesia may not feel what other people feel, we all react at a biological level to the witness of human interaction. When we witness two people hugging, our mirror neuron system is activated, and we produce oxytocin, a hormone that is released when we experience a hug ourselves, and has been shown to increase trust between humans (Kosfeld, Heinrichs, Zak, Fischbacher, Fehr, 2005). Indeed, by simply watching someone being touched on the cheek triggers us to become more conscious of sensations of touch on our own cheek, in a phenomenon known as visual remapping of touch (Maister, Banissy, and Tsakiris, 2013). Mirror-touch synesthesia can be understood, then, to be a more extreme experience of what we all experience each day (Ward and Banissy, 2015).

The implications of our mirror neuron system are vast, but perhaps most particularly relevant to how we as beings, full of senses and physical connections, relate to one another. We can become more in tune with another in our own perceptions of ourselves by witnessing another being touched on the cheek, while we, too, are touched on the cheek. Somewhere in our cognition, our representations of our own faces begin to blend with that of the person we are observing. Meanwhile, the same is true for a synesthete who merely observes another being touched on the cheek, but does not experience touch himself or herself (Maister, et al., 2013). Somehow, in our own minds, the face of the other becomes representative of our own face. We linger on the bridge of *and* between self and other.

### **3.1 The Beloved Other**

The bridge of *and* between self and other can also be called *love*. Love is complex, and impossible to define. The impossibility of defining love is linked inherently to the

impossibility of defining grief: each experience of it is individual. Love depends both on the self and the other, transforming itself based on the realities of each. As the self and the other shift and grow, the bridge between the two accommodates, becoming stronger at times, while at other times, becoming more tenuous. And sometimes the transformations are not about the solidity of the bridge of love at all, sometimes, it is about beauty, transfiguration, or a million other things. As the Sufi poet Hafiz writes:

**Like Passionate Lips**

There are  
So many positions of  
Love:  
Each curve on a branch,  
the thousand different ways  
Your eyes can embrace us,  
The infinite shapes your  
Mind can draw,  
The spring  
Orchestra of scents,  
The currents of light combusting  
Like passionate lips,  
The revolution of Existence's skirt  
Whose folds contain other worlds,  
Your every sign that falls against  
His inconceivable  
Omnipresent  
Body.  
(Ladinsky, 1999, p. 181)

There are so many positions of Love. Love is sensual and spiritual. It requires us to think of the sounds and sights of our loved one, the scents and sensations of ourselves. To walk across this bridge is a kind of meditation, a kind of prayer. Prayer, as the Sufi philosopher Ibn Arabi described, is an Intimate Dialogue between lover and the Beloved, self and other that are neither mutually exclusive or inclusive. The other side of the bridge is the beloved,

and in reaching the beloved we come to see ourselves more fully, we come to love ourselves as well.

I have chosen in my expression of faith to avoid the name God. Instead, I choose the *Beloved*. I have forgone *God* because of my childhood associations with “Him.” I used to think of the Beloved like Santa Claus. He was a he. He had a beard. He lived in a castle on the top of a mountain surrounded by sunshine and babbling brooks and lots of candy. It was some combination of the North Pole, Mount Olympus, and my own version of a perfect world. I cannot conceive of such a being anymore without a tone of sarcasm playing in my mind. I wonder about the candyland fantasies I have about myself, and others.

Ibn Arabi, who theorized prayer as the Intimate Dialogue between lover and the Beloved suggested in his works that the Beloved is a figment of our imaginations (Corbin, 1998). It may seem heretical to say this – and certainly, Ibn Arabi had his share of criticism for this stance – but the existence of a deity, or deities, is not something that can be known in the world of empiricism or, indeed, in the world of literal understanding. The Beloved, then, exists fully in the imaginal realm, the realm in which Ibn Arabi suggests our bodies become spirits and our spirits become embodied. This is a notion that Lewis (2009) echoes in his work. Speaking of his deceased wife, Lewis (2009) writes, “kind people have said to me, ‘She is with God.’ In one sense that is most certain. She is, like God, incomprehensible and unimaginable” (p. 24). The Beloved is a figment of our imagination, and, as such, can only be met in the imaginal realm.

The Beloved is beyond all explanation, and in the Intimate Dialogue the other with whom we share our journey is the beloved other. Each time we feel we have neared knowing the Beloved, we have already taken six steps back. That which is unknowable cannot help



but be imagined, fantastically. Imagined, subjectively. None of us believes in the same version of the Beloved, despite some who may wish it to be so. Though I professed to follow a particular faith, which certainly did not describe the Beloved as a Santa Claus-like figure surrounded by candy, this was, for a time, the version of the Beloved that I imagined. “We do not pray to the Divine Essence in its hiddenness; each faithful (‘abd) prays to *his* Lord (*Rabb*), the Lord who is in the form of his faith.” (Corbin, 1998, p. 248). The Beloved is not one reality, but many, subjectively conceived. Prayer, as the Intimate Dialogue, as the walking across the bridge of *and* between self and other, requires us to enter the imaginal realm. This is because the Beloved exists only in our imagination, in order to converse with the Beloved, we must find a way to traverse the bridge of love through prayer and imagine the Beloved. The reality is that “God is not a ‘being’ at all, not even an infinite one. God is Be-ing in the sense that without God, nothing can *be*... We are ‘con-spiritors’ with god, breathing in the Breath of the Compassionate” (Cheetham, 2015, p. 5). Con-spiritors. Together with breath. This is prayer: we do not exist without each other, lover and beloved, we breathe together. Through our imaginations we embrace the Beloved, but we are also embraced as lovers by the presence of the Beloved.

Grief, and attending to grief, becomes entangled with prayer. In Islam, in the Beloved’s words:

‘I was a hidden Treasure, I yearned to be known. That is why I produced creatures, in order to be known in them.’ This phrase is represented as the sadness of the divine Names suffering anguish in nonknowledge because no one names them, and it is this sadness that descended in the divine Breath...appeased by the divine Sigh (Corbin, 1998, p. 184).

The divine sigh which brought about creation.

This divine sigh of existential loneliness is not a literal truth for me, but a truth to hold in my interactions with others: we crave understanding from one another. We crave companionship. We crave to be unburdened of our grief. It seems that the etymology of the Beloved's name, *Allah*, is in a place in which "to be overwhelmed with sadness, to sigh toward" (Corbin, 1998, p. 112) meets "to desire, to sigh, to feel compassion" (Corbin, 1998, p. 113). And it is here that we realize that "this Name then expresses sadness, nostalgia aspiring eternally to... be once more *beyond* His revealed being" (Corbin, 1998, p. 113). Understood, but unknown. *Imagined*.

The divine Sigh that *created* because anguish had descended in the divine Breath. We are once again attending to grief in engaging in prayer.

In my grief, I ran daily and I created poems, and shared my writing for the first time, perhaps, too, so that I might be known. My writing came from the jugular, and more often than not, it still does. It is my own Intimate Dialogue with the Beloved. These are my own forms of prayer. Though I struggle each time I write to bring joy, to bear a lightness in my expression, it so often gets "to the heart of the matter, with matters of the heart, often filled with pain" (Chambers, 2012, xxiii). Each time I set out to write, I rediscover a truth: "We can never keep the heart out of our writing. The heart is always there... We can pretend that we are keeping the heart out of our writing, but we are only pretending, and pretense is a tense way to live." (Leggo, 2012, p. 124). And so, the Intimate Dialogue is not always a spoken experience, but can be a written one, one in which we run or write together, and share in each other's journeys. Prayer, like love, takes many forms.

And, in trying to understand the Beloved, there exists a beautiful relation between this quest of prayer and the research at hand that "it is about dwelling in a space of inquiry

that resists formal naming: A willingness to allow for discomfort, frayed edges, and holes” (Springgay, Irwin, & Kind, 2005, p. 901). It is through the Intimate Dialogue, the prayerful crossing of the bridge of love, that we may attend to grief. Grief as the experience of the beloved other, and grief as the beloved other itself.

The Intimate Dialogue, as prayer, exists in the imaginal realm. But prayer, in my tradition, is not only an act of imagination. In the Ismaili Muslim tradition, prayer engages all the senses. We use our hands, turned upward towards the sky when asking for something. We stand at times, kneel at times, bow at times. We take a kind of communion; holy water and something sweet. We light incense, it fills our nostrils and the faint scent rests on our clothes for days. Someone leads the prayers; they call, we answer. We sing. We close our eyes, we gaze inward. We touch hands with our neighbor, whether we know them or not. We wish them what I’ve always understood as “meeting the Beloved.” This was the part that was always a bit awkward for me. When I was very young, I remember choosing not to turn to a neighbor because I didn’t know her and felt strange reaching out to shake her hand. On the drive home, my mother asked me about it. “I didn’t know her” I said, “I felt uncomfortable.” She explained to me that we can wish for goodness in people’s lives, even when we don’t know them. This is not something to shy away from. It was explained to me that it is a kindness to take someone’s hand in yours, look her in the eye, and tell them you wish for goodness in her life. This kind of intimacy became normal to me. And a kind of dance I would enjoy, not only turning and offering my hand to those directly next to me, but I’d also turn around and thrust my hand towards whoever was sitting behind me. Sometimes, if I was quick enough, I’d also be able to get the one or two people next to whoever was behind me. Even when I found myself quite accidentally sitting next to someone I disliked, I

begrudgingly offered my hand. Yes, even goodness in your life. And I meant it. It was in these very early times of my life that I understood implicitly our interconnectedness. Even with those I didn't necessarily like that much, I looked them in the eye and really wished for their peace.

### **3.2 Looking at Grief**

Grief is a personal experience, but reminds us of the complex connections we hold to others, "loss has made a tenuous 'we' of us all" (Butler, 2006, p. 20). Grief is, in a metaphorical sense, the loss of a limb, because in this loss, we find ourselves indelibly tied to the rest of humanity, not only seeking reprieve in others, but also tied in the wholly unique feelings of loss we each experience. Just as an amputee may experience relief of an itch on a phantom limb by observing someone else scratch, we are asked to see the grief of another, and to let others *know* that we see it.

This is what it means to bear witness. Bearing witness can have legal implications; witnesses testify in court in areas that they are considered experts, or in events that they have some knowledge. Witness comes from the root *wit*, holding in its meaning consciousness, knowledge, understanding, and wisdom (Witness, 2017). To bear witness is to testify to that consciousness, understanding, and wisdom. To see another's grief, then, is to testify to my understanding of the heaviness they carry. It does not require full or even perfect knowledge, but it is a form of acknowledgement.

This acknowledgement of the other happens at the first glance of the face of the other, according to Emmanuel Levinas (1969). To Levinas, in the face, we witness the transcendence of the other: the face reveals the other's fundamental alterity and enduring

freedom (Rae, 2016). The face is not solely a physical reality for Levinas, but is the “‘exteriority that is not reducible... to the interiority of memory,’ an expression of being that ‘overflows images’ and ‘breaks through the envelopings’ and facades of material form” (Joy, 2009, p. 58). Freedom emerges, then, as a product of ethical interrelation. We become free when we relate to one another, not when we live as autonomous individuals. Levinas (2006), recognizing that facing this alterity is no easy feat, suggests that it draws out conflicting emotions:

There is... in the Face of the Other always the death of the Other and thus, in some way, an incitement to murder, the temptation to go to the extreme, to completely neglect the other – and at the same time (and this is the paradoxical thing) the Face is also the ‘Thou Shalt not Kill.’ A Thou-Shalt-not-Kill that can also be explicated much further: it is the fact that I cannot let the other die alone, it is like a calling out to me (Levinas, 2006, p. 89).

Levinas asks of us to approach the face of the Other in the spirit of a Thou-Shalt-not-Kill, a spirit that welcomes the alterity of the other, and the freedom of the other. I have argued elsewhere (Thomas, in press) that this requires us to approach alterity with complexity thinking: when we bear witness to the face of the other, complexity allows us to embrace the interconnectedness of our subjectivities. Cultivating the recognition of our interrelatedness as our primary instinct, before the instinct of murder, is the difference between the ethical approach to the other and the competitive instinct towards the other. It is the difference between freedom and captivity. It is necessary when confronted by the face of the other who seems diametrically opposed to all that I am, all that I believe. It is urgent to be reminded of this in times like these.

To bear witness to another asks us to first embrace our interrelatedness to the other, which requires a sense of hospitality and welcome. Hospitality to the other is a religious

imperative in Islam and Christianity (Allard, 2012), Hinduism (George, 2009), and virtually every other religious tradition. Hospitality of the Other in my tradition, is a reciprocal experience, contrary to the notion of hospitality posited by Derrida who suggests it is a one-sided exercise that cannot be ethically conceived of as anything but a gift. To Derrida, when conditions (even as basic as knowing the name of the guest) are applied to the hospitality, it becomes unethical (Ruitenbergh, 2015). The Islamic tradition of hospitality, however, recognizes the vulnerability of both the guest and the host in the situation: inviting the stranger into the host's home is an act of vulnerability for the host, entering the host's home is an act of vulnerability for the guest (Allard, 2012). This shared vulnerability in the Islamic tradition does not exist as a transactional exchange, but as an offering of oneself to the other, as host and guest (Allard, 2012). Hospitality as a reciprocal engagement in Islam was perhaps born of the necessity for hospitality for survival in the desert conditions of the Middle East when Islam was founded: without the host's unquestioned sharing of food, and perhaps particularly water, the would-be guests would have almost certainly died. Refusing hospitality, then, was akin to choosing to murder the stranger. Hospitality is an opportunity to save a life, and an opportunity to be saved. To think of hospitality as reciprocal, rather than the host becoming the hero of the narrative and the guest a mere 'taker' may be instructive in our world today as we think of refugees who are facing death when we choose not to enter into a reciprocal relationship of hospitality with them. There exists an ability to reject hospitality because we conceive of our guests as takers, not recognizing the inherent reciprocity of their presence in our home, and their vulnerability in entering our home. In the Qur'anic tradition, hospitality is not only a physical welcoming into one's home, but also the sharing of a meal. "According to the laws of hospitality, a stranger under your roof is under

your protection, but if he refuses to eat, he refuses your hospitality and keeps himself free from any ties of guest and host” (George, 2009, p. 418). Fundamental to this philosophy is the idea that the host should exhibit vulnerability by welcoming the guest to their table to eat, while the guest exhibits vulnerability by entering the home, and taking part in the meal. Feeding, and being fed. Welcoming, and being welcomed.

The day my mother died, I somehow managed to order a pizza online; I was thinking of my dad who often doesn’t have lunch during his long days of work. It was before most people in our community knew what had happened and there was no food in the house to prepare dinner. It was even before my father knew she had been killed. I had a few hours between finding out what had happened and when he was due home; I was at a loss for what to do. What do you do when your mother has been killed halfway around the world? The pizza delivery man appeared. He had no clue of the life-altering heaviness I was carrying. I gave him an unusually large tip. The next day was Navroz, the Persian New Year, a date that Ismailis around the world celebrate to mark the beginning of Spring. It is one of those days like Christmas when even the least attending members of the community generally show up to celebrate. To pray for my mother and to pray for ourselves and to find comfort and probably a host of other reasons, we attended as well. As with all deaths in our community, there was the usual announcement: [insert name here] of [insert birthplace here] has died in [insert place of death here]. Roshan Hirji Thomas of Mbrara Uganda has died in Afghanistan. The next day, people showed up to grieve with us, and to take care of our most basic needs, particularly in the form of food. Keema, an Indian ground beef dish, to be specific. We had so much keema that we ate it almost every day for months after my mother’s death. In those days, thinking of food was a task for which I could barely summon the energy. Without the

sense of hospitality, the bearing witness to our grief and suffering, that these kindhearted people showed us, the taste of my grief might have been pizza, unsuspectingly delivered. Instead, keema, lovingly made for *us* became the intimate taste of our grief.

Bearing witness is foundational to Islam as a whole, as adherents are asked to affirm their belief through the *shahada*. The *shahada* is a statement in which the individual bears witness that there is no deity but God, and that Muhammad is the final prophet sent by God to guide humanity. Anyone who recites this testimony is considered a Muslim (Esposito, 2003). The *shahada* is the set of words a Muslim utters to bear witness to their faith in Islam. A *shahid* is one who lives his or her life in reflection of this testimony. Over time, a *shahid* became one who died for the sake of their religion; a martyr (al-Atawneh, 2008). A word of our times that is loaded, like a gun.

It has become so commonplace for people who commit acts of terror to die in the process of killing others, either by design or in the aftermath of the violence they commit that there is now a well-established entanglement of martyrdom and terror (Buc, 2015). In constructing a religious narrative around these violent acts, groups that incite terror as *jihad*, have also crafted the notion of the *shahid* as one who bears witness to their faith through death.

*Jihad*, though often understood as “holy war” given its association with the Crusades and its use in today’s world, is more accurately translated as “striving” or “exerting oneself” (Cook, 2015, p. 1), something akin to Pinar’s (2015) subjective reconstruction in the regressive phase of *currere*. It is generally understood that there are two forms of *jihad*, both that take the definition of “warfare with spiritual significance” (Cook, 2015, p. 2). For the literal understanding of it, it is a physical struggle that aims to expand Islam and combat



those who oppose its expansion, only once all peaceful means had been attempted (Wicker, 2006, p. 2). This is known as the *lesser jihad*, as it was generally understood by Muslims that a *jihad* to enforce outward significations of Islam and submission “could never guarantee the achievement of genuine belief (*‘aqida*)” (Ayoub, 2007, p. 150). The *greater jihad*, on the other hand, takes a spiritual interpretation to the concept of warfare. Akin to the language we use today about “fighting our inner demons” or even the rhetoric used to talk about the “War on Poverty”. The *greater jihad*, then, is the internal struggle to which Islam asks its adherents to attend. For Ibn ‘Arabi, the *greater jihad* is the only *jihad*. His reasoning is steeped in the philosophy of the Pythagorean Islamic philosophy, who offered that God is one, and that, when thinking numerically, one exists in all other numbers, it is the foundation from which all other numbers are built and understood. For Ibn ‘Arabi and the Brethren, God as One translates to God becoming the basic unit from which all else emerges, and contained in all things. It is believed in the Islamic tradition that when the Beloved created humans, the Beloved breathed life into us, and that breath of the Beloved is our spirit, referred to as *nafs* in Arabic. *Nafs* is a term that can be translated as self or soul and is that part of the self that is intangible, the part that is indescribable, and often incomprehensible. As William Chittick (2005) explains, *nafs* is something that all creatures, from pebbles on the beach to birds in the sky, and even the Beloved, can claim. It is a term that binds all of creation as having been touched by the love of the Beloved. In that binding, however, there is not a sense of our selves being the same as one another – the diversity of being across creation is maintained, however there remains the entirety of the whole embedded within each part. It is our subjective selves, and it embraces all.

The relationship between *jihad* and *shahid* is not a new one, and has a similar relationship between the concept of martyr and holy war in the Christian tradition. As Wicker (2006) suggests:

In both traditions [Christianity and Islam], then, the concept of witnessing to the faith originated in a non-violent context, but later, as a result of persecution of the faithful because specialized into *dying* for it. One can conceive of circumstances in which this development need not have happened. If Christians had been recognized earlier as full, reliable citizens of the Roman Empire, and thus as reliable witnesses, and if Muslims had not been attacked so soon by enemies who threatened to destroy their community, things could have turned out differently. Of course, given the nature of each faith in its early stages, and the context in which each emerged, it would have needed a miracle for these persecutions not to have taken place. But the point remains: witnessing and dying are two different things, and it is only human oppression that makes them so difficult to keep apart in practice (Wicker, 2006, p. 2).

Hospitality is a fundamental element of both Christianity and Islam, and yet, what happens when we welcome the Other that is actively seeking to destroy our home? I have an “unsentimental understanding of violence and power” (Joy, 2009, p. 64), which begs me to ask this question: how can we embrace that which threatens us? Should we? And how can we cultivate the ethic of hospitality in the face of tyrannical power and terrible violence? How does this perceived and real threat change who we are at a fundamental level? Should it? These are questions that linger for me. Ultimately, the relationship between witnessing and death could perhaps have been a different one if these religions were not faced with persecution. This suggests to me that it is worth treating the guest with openness, because in that hospitality, a reciprocal relationship can be born. Grief could destroy me, but perhaps, though unwelcomed, I can treat it with hospitality. Perhaps it can be my guest and enter into

a complicated conversation with me. Perhaps we can have a reciprocal relationship that makes it more than unwanted, but educative.

It took ten days for my mother's body to return to Canada. There was some bureaucracy involved in repatriating her body, and it was a public holiday in Afghanistan. There are some places that find themselves in such turmoil that public holidays are marked more often with murder than with joy. At my mother's funeral, several people told me that she is a *shahid*. I balked at this, and though I gave some perfunctory "thank you", I disagreed with every fiber of my inner being. I did not like the suggestion because I imagined that at the funeral of the boys who killed her, there were probably similar words of comfort being used. And this, to me was a meaningless name for her. In this understanding of her, we lose the tension of complexity and are left with a caricature of her that is either all good in the case of my friends and family, or all evil in the view of her killers. It is the caricatures we create of people that leads us away from the ethic Levinas described in seeing the face of the Other. It was the vilification of my mother that, I think, led to her death. To her killers she was either guilty or innocent, and their instinct was not to question – they would leave that up to their God. They came face to face with her, saw Otherness, and chose murder. In her death, I found those calling her *shahid* were distorting her face. Instead of seeing her as a multidimensional human, complex in every way, she became unidimensional as a martyr, a hero; as perfect. But I want to allow her complex world to continue to exist in all the ways she illuminated and infuriated me. I want to bear witness to *her*.

### 3.3 Echoes of Grief

Grief quietly urges the sharing of the burden it brings. In Canadian Indigenous traditions, the expectation is that burdens are relieved through the sharing of stories – the purpose of community is to share the heaviness of grief across many people, making the burden lighter (Rybak & Decker-Fitts, 2009). In many other cultural traditions, the communal response to grief is to offer *condolences*. Each mourner shall take her division, portion, or share of the burden. In this act, they offer their regrets.

It became clear to me that to meet grief with regret, it was not adequate to simply *witness* the grief: it required action that went beyond testimony or even understanding and knowledge. It required us to share in the mourning, to carry the burden of grief together. A regret is, quite literally, an act to bewail the dead. It is the mourning that pre-Islamic women led in Arabia, that echoed in the poetry that my adopted Afghan siblings sang in the days leading to my mother's funeral. Sound is so integral to the experience of grief and its response, regret. There are certain sounds that continue to echo through my mind when grief stops me in my tracks. The way my brother's voice strained itself in an unbelievable contortionist trick as he ensured I was somewhere safe to hear the heaviest news he carried: "they killed Mum." The way some air just refused to pass through my father's throat the moment I told him that my mother had been killed – his intensely breathless "what" came out no louder than a whisper, twice. It was more clearly as a statement on the horror of what I told him, than a question. "In the ancient mythologies the word for soul was often related to the word for breath" (Idhe, 2007, p. 3) and in those whispered *whats* I heard part of a soul breaking. I heard this, too, in the pre-dawn tears of my pregnant sister that first and endless night.

What we witness is generally that which we see with our eyes. Sound - and its counterpart listening - so rarely enjoy the recognition they deserve. Sight offers an important way of knowing and understanding our world, but “the simple preference for sight may also become, in its very richness, a source of the relative inattentiveness to the global fullness of experience” (Idhe, 2007, p. 8). To enjoy the richness of life, we must be attentive to listening as much as witnessing. To enter into a complicated conversation with grief, it is not enough to see it; it must be heard as well.

Sound becomes relevant to grief and regret in the form of echoes. *Echo* holds worlds within itself; it is a physical phenomenon with a deep mythology. Ovid crafted a story about a talkative nymph, Echo, who earns the wrath of the goddess Hera by lying to her. To punish Echo, Hera curses her to only repeat the words said to her. In time, Echo and Narcissus, a beautiful man, cross paths. Echo falls in love with him, but, unable to express her feelings, she must wait for him to use the words she would like to express to him. When she manages to express her love, repeating his words, but using her own intonation, he rejects her and chooses to spend his days gazing at his own reflection in the water. Eventually, Echo disappears physically, but is heard reverberating by all, while Narcissus is also no longer embodied, but is replaced by flowers that seem to gaze at themselves along the water bank all day long.

Echo’s story is a tragic one. It seems in this story that her autonomy is stripped from her, at the very least her autonomy of expression. But, in imagining Echo, waiting for Narcissus to use the words that she may repeat in her own way, this story “sheds light on the impossibility of reducing the sound of an echo to the status of a simple repetition, or rather that a simple repetition is never simple or unambiguous” (Käll, 2015, p. 61). As a physical

phenomenon, an echo is the result of a sound, beginning from an origin, traveling as a wave, bouncing off surfaces, and returning to the listening with a delay. The delay is proportional to the distance that the sound must travel to reach the surfaces. Depending on the type of surface, the quality of the echo changes: a curved surface offers a different kind of echo than a porous surface. The kinds of materials also determine the variability of the echo. Echoes, then, are not to be dismissed as mere repetition, but rather, a means of rescuing the original sound with unique responses. As Käll (2015) argues, though an echo may seem like a lifeless phenomenon, the reality is quite different: each echo is unique, and even the echoes of the same sound origin will simultaneously save and alter the origin's message.

In recent months, a new phenomenon of the echo has been recognized: the echo chamber of media, particularly social media. People of differing views don't talk to each other. The problem with echo chambers is not that the echo exists, but that the echo is choosing the origin. That is, people seek the information that corroborates their views and then echo those pieces that reflect their own views. This is compounded by the algorithmic nature of social media that prevents people from engaging with views that do not represent their own. A true echo is one that engages with the narrative in its own, unique voice. It begins to demonstrate what it means to offer regrets in the face of grief: it is an imperfect and variable reflection of the grief another feels. For me to echo someone's grief, then, is to reflect it back to them, in my own voice. When grief is shared with me, I become a surface against which their burden can be reflected, and in so doing, I can absorb a minute part of the heaviness they carry. This does not mean implicit agreement, but it is, at the very least, a recognition that the heaviness exists. Echoing the grief of the other within is an exploration of the complexity of the heaviness of grief; its weight is not distributed equally, my inner

world may not find agreement or finality, but rather, may have to remain in a world of origins and echoes that forever reinterpret the narrative of my burden.

### 3.4 Touching Grief

While its origin is not entirely clear, *regret* likely comes from the notion of re-greet, that is to greet again, to repeat (OED). What does it mean to re-greet grief? Etymologically, to greet something is “to call on” it, with its roots in the meaning “to approach closely, to touch” (Regret, 2017). To offer regrets, then, is to re-greet it, and to touch the grief of another.

To understand what it means to touch the grief of another, we must first understand what it means to touch. Touch is, to Derrida (2005), “a question of life and death” (p. 47). For him, “touch, more than sight or hearing, gives nearness, proximity – it gives nearby” (p. 95), it demands a nearness that neither seeing nor hearing asks of us. Derrida (2005) describes touch as a gift, or an offering. Touch can certainly imply something is hit, though the connotation it brings is often one of gentleness. When, in elementary school, we played “touch rugby” it was a rugby of a gentler, less violent nature. Euphemistically, touch is suggestive of sexual touch, but when we speak of being *touched*, it can mean a physical sensation, or something beyond the surface of the skin. A piece of music or a work of art can touch a person in their non-physical being; their imagination. Touch takes us to the limit of *me* and *you*, to the bridge of self and other. We can conceive of it like the space between an asymptote and zero: we are ever closer, and, indeed, may at times seem as on, but there remains eternally something *untouchable* in each of us. In this space of touch, *we* exist, neither as one nor as two, but in a blurry in-betweeness that cannot be captured in numbers.

At the outset, I explained that this research was situated in North America, often between Canada and the United States as I traveled between my home and school in Vancouver, and my husband in New York. The research was often explored in-relation to the border between the two nations. Both a tangible space – I was able to stand “at the border” – and an ephemeral idea – what did it mean to stand at the border for inspection and then to cross the border? This form of touch was neither intimate nor soft. More often than not, it was stressful. Stressful because the line was long and I wanted to catch my flight, or stressful because there was an air of suspicion around me: why did I travel to Afghanistan? *What* exactly am I studying? Do I know that I am almost 30 years old and *still* in school? It wasn’t necessarily my ethnicity or my religion that animated these officers. Oftentimes, it was: You look different, are you Brazilian? Samira... that’s Arabic, right? Samira... were your parents hippies? These questions offered a strange opening to my imagination – I wondered about the all-white Samira whose parents were hippies. Did she grow up smoking pot and playing the guitar? Or even the Arabic Samira, did she change her last name because Samira Muhammad was just too difficult to deal with when crossing the border? Did that last name give her a grief that pushed her to take the bland and unexciting contrast to the ‘exotic’ Samira?

To touch the grief of another, then, is to enter this border space, this imaginal realm, together. As it happens, the border space, what Claudia Ruitenberg terms the *threshold* is the site where education operated (Ruitenberg, 2015). The notion of the threshold historically was a question of initiation between the role of stranger and being one who is admitted past the gate into the “citadel of civilization” (Ruitenberg, 2015, p. 3). Arendt, however, offers that despite children crossing the border into an old world, “the task of education is to



welcome newcomers into the old world, the world as it is, and not to predetermine for newcomers what they may want to do with that world as they receive it” (Ruitenbergh, 2016, p. 3). Freedom lives wildly when we touch. We enter the border area and, instead of feeling tense, we are given to imagination. We are given to the prayer bridge between self and other, where we exist both physically in touch, but also in the imaginal realm where we may cross the borders that physicality maintains.

The imaginal realm is the ephemeral border in which we shed the shackles of literalness (Greene, 2011). It is the space in which we move from what is to what might be, we transition from the ordinary to the extraordinary; a world in which multiple realities exist at the same time. It is the world of poets, who give us the language to see the mundane as magical; artists who paint what we have not yet conceived; storytellers who give shape to our inner lives; and musicians who illuminate our hearts through a string’s reverberations. “It is the world through which spirits are embodied, and bodies spiritualized” (Bloom, 1998, p. xiii). The purpose of entering this imaginal realm is to find a world in which we may touch another, and particularly, touch the grief of one another. Derrida (2005) asks, “when our eyes touch, is it day or is it night?” (p. 2). To explore this question, we cannot remain in the world of the literal. We must find ourselves in the world of metaphors and illumination. It is only when we enter imaginal realm together that the Intimate Dialogue can occur.

### **3.5 Intimate Dialogue: Origins**

Mum died on the eve of the Spring Equinox.

There is something about grief in the time of Earth’s renewal that just made sense.

Our house was filled with flowers in pots and new vases we had to buy just to manage all the beautiful colours that entered our home. It was fragrant. We had to water our living room daily. And the flowers we planted in the fall had suddenly bloomed in the garden. Earlier than expected. The days were warmer than they should have been.

These flowers required no tending. These ones were tending to us, to our hearts.

Something became blurred in this moment. With a constant stream of visitors, our doors were always open. The outside was not really so separate from the inside, which was really not so protected. The walls no longer felt as solid as they once did when I was a child growing up in this home. Flimsy. The flowers were blooming everywhere. Even within our hearts, though all else was suspended mid-fall, waiting for time to catch up to the inevitable crash.

She was killed on March 20, at an evening dinner to honour the coming of the New Year. She left this world miles from home.

On March 21 our home, the one she had built, was filled with flowers. And reporters.

A camera crew to document the tragedy. They arrived uninvited. Made themselves at home. The outside came inside. They had come for our churning stomachs, our lungs that perhaps still haven't expanded like they used to. They had come for the jugular.

We'll tell the story whether you talk to us or not. This way you can tell the story you want to tell.

Aftershock. A different kind of attack altogether.

He sat before us, awkwardly, struggling between smiles and looks of concern. We had to frame the shot just right. Face the camera. Tell our sorrow. Let's have an intimate conversation for the next five minutes.

Some words. My brother impressed me in his composure. My pregnant sister knew better than to come downstairs. I can't remember where my father was.

Eat, all together, they told our confused digestive tracts. I'd like to get a shot of that.

You have to be kidding. Time for you to get out of my house. You've got enough shots in today.

It was in this experience of struggling between the world of vulnerability and intimacy and the world of publicity that my concept of the Intimate Dialogue was born. The bridge between these two worlds is treacherous; it feels as though it is unable to hold me in safety. In those first interactions with the interviewer and my own grief, I came to realize that, though the reporter was looking for an intimate portrayal of our loss, his approach was all wrong. Now, almost three years later, I don't even remember his name. He was asking me to behave as I would with a lifelong lover, while maintaining his own attitude of a one-night stand. In this exchange, I did not feel unconditionally welcomed or embraced in my complexity. It wasn't the reporter's fault – that is the nature of the news: he remains firmly on the ground of the world of publicity. I was drowning next to the shores of intimacy.

We may enter into an Intimate Dialogue with another person, but in this work, I seek to enter into an Intimate Dialogue with grief. In order to do this, I must take grief to be my Beloved. Not the Beloved of perfection that some faithful believe in, but the Beloved that infuriates as much as heals. The Beloved that Hafiz railed against in his poetry, the Beloved from whom we may run from, if we knew that Beloved was coming for us:

### **Tired of Speaking Sweetly**

God wants to manhandle us,  
Lock us inside of a tiny room with Himself  
And practice His dropkick.

The Beloved sometimes wants  
To do us a great favor:  
Hold us upside down  
And shake all the nonsense out.  
But when we hear  
He is in such a "playful drunken mood"  
Most everyone I know  
Quickly packs their bags and hightails it  
Out of town.  
(Ladinsky, 1999, p. 187)

Grief, like the Beloved of Hafiz's poetry, is both a gift and a curse. It is what binds us to the rest of humanity, it is what wakes us aching in the night. It is what reminds us that despite our beliefs of control and our desire of outcomes, there is something beyond our reach, and we are *all* deviants.

The Intimate Dialogue is necessarily sensual in that it asks us to engage both with our senses and our imagination. It asks of us to recognize our interconnectedness, to embrace the ethic of hospitality, and to welcome the other to the dialogue. Then, it asks of us to bear witness to one another, to attest to the other's burden. We are asked to exist in the experience of taste and scent, and to reach out to touch the other, pushing the boundaries of our shells. We are gently urged towards being both the origin of sound as well as the unique echo of the Other. Entering into this space of embodied spirits and spiritual embodiment is *intimate*.

Intimacy has a complicated reputation. It is not sexual, though while sex certainly offers spaces of intimacy, there is also the potential for sex without touching the imagination. Intimacy can also imply a sort of fairytale of solidarity that is not always necessarily true nor required in enacting intimacy. Intimacy indicates friendship and closeness, in a sense, companionship. A companion, to Jean Vanier (2008),

implies sharing together, eating together, nourishing each other, walking together. The one who accompanies is like a midwife, helping us to come to life, to live more fully. But the accompanier

receives life also, and as people open up to each other, a communion of hearts develops between them. They do not clutch on to each other but give life to one another and call each other to greater freedom. (Vanier, 2008, p. 129).

Intimacy can imply this closeness, this call to greater freedom. An intimate friend can become the *anam cara*, the soul friend, of John O'Donoghue's work (1996). But intimacy is also used in the context of Intimate Partner Violence that indicates that despite intimacy, some relationships of intimacy can be dangerous and violent. Intimacy is a risk, it is entering into the imaginal realm without a parachute, and without a wall to hide behind. Intimacy requires the nakedness of bearing witness, it requires the nearness for echoes, and it demands the closeness of touch. It is a risk to be this vulnerable and to shed the notion of certainty in favour of ambiguity. "In intimacy, analysis yields not only to rational conclusions but to recognition and from recognition to empathy, and from empathy to deeper, more complex understanding" (Dodds, 2013, p. 119). Taking the ethic of hospitality into the Intimate Dialogue, we find that reciprocity, and co-vulnerability is an integral part of the Intimate Dialogue. When bearing the burden of grief, intimacy can be essential. Weiss and Lowenthal (1975) argued that intimate relationships are "a major resource in the face of life crises, the absence of which makes adjustment more difficult" (Sexton & Sexton, 1982, p. 7). We need intimacy to fall back on when the burden of grief becomes too heavy to bear. We need the person or the people with whom we can use shorthand, who will lay soft clouds around our feet in the imaginal realm that we may be caught as we give way to the weight. In the fall, it is the intimate relationship that enables lightness.

Light.

My mother's name meant 'light' and it was something that I thought about often in the days following her death. Her name was like a prophecy for her life. Lightness does not only suggest the weight of a thing. It is about illuminating something. In her faith, the Light was a metaphor for understanding, something she sought both in her eternal quest for further education, as well as in her spiritual journey. She sought enlightenment. And in realizing that, I understood that since her death, I have sought that too. Suggesting that someone has become enlightened indicates that they have illuminated some part of religious belief that is often shrouded in darkness. Perhaps this enlightenment makes the sorrows of the world less burdensome. I have pursued enlightenment of the burden of my grief. I have wanted to both understand it, and make it a little bit less heavy. I have needed my intimate relationships to achieve this. Enlightenment, asks two to come together and to share the burden of grief through illuminating a deeper understanding.

My Intimate Dialogue with grief is a complicated conversation with the other within and beyond myself. It is an exploration of the grief I feel pressing against me, and the ways in which this estranges me from who I am, the ways I feel at home and alien to myself in this complicated conversation. It is, ultimately, an exploration of the ways that grief informs my purposes in life's journey. The Intimate Dialogue with grief is heaviness, met with an embrace, echoed, reflected back, and enlightened each time it bounces from one to the other. The Intimate Dialogue does not happen just once. The truth must be spoken several times before the echoes back feel real. That is, grief must be uttered (the thing must be put out into the world) and embraced, and echoed several times before the burden of grief is enlightened, carried by enough people. That is why African Americans can't just "get over it" when we speak of slavery. Or in the case of the Indigenous peoples of Canada when reconciliation is

supposed to be the result of truth. As Coates (2015) describes slavery, it cannot be thought of as *just* an institution or a set of policies, because there were individuals and families who experienced it, who lived it. Abolishing it did not end their experience of slavery:

for this woman [the slave], enslavement is not a parable. It is a damnation. It is the never-ending night. And the length of that night is most of our history. Never forget that we were enslaved in this country longer than we have been free. Never forget that for 250 years black people were born into chains – whole generations followed by more generations who knew nothing but chains. (Coates, 2015, p. 70).

The grief is heavy, the burden of it is enormous, and though it is easier to brush under the rug, in so doing, we who hold power, make the burden even heavier. When we enter into the Intimate Dialogue with the other, we can enlighten the burden they carry. They can enlighten the burden we carry. It is a reciprocal relationship, like that of hospitality.

We need the echoes of our own grief to lighten our burden. This is why there is such ache when women voice the struggle of *being* a woman and the response is not echo, but insistence on the lie of democracy, *we are all equal* we hear, and yet, it does not turn out that way. Our grief is heavy and must be carried by more than one, we need entire civilizations, to hear and carry this burden with us, since we have been carrying it for generations ourselves.

### **3.6 Enacting Enlightenment and Cosmopolitanism**

The Intimate Dialogue is a different kind of grief work; grief work that allows us to come into dialogue not only with grief but with others, to share the heaviness of our lives. To understand and be understood. Grief work that enlightens the heaviness of each of their lives. It is heaviness, yes. Heaviness is carried by all, yes. But how is it uniquely experienced by

*this person?* How do I uniquely respond to it? How do we, together, uniquely unburden each other? These are the fundamental questions of the Intimate Dialogue.

The Intimate Dialogue, in a sense, happens in two mother tongues, the mother tongue of the self and the mother tongue of the other. For the self and the other, each of these languages is the “language of love, the language of anger, the language of humour, the language of being at one with the language that nurtured and nurtures” (Aoki, 1987, p. 242). These mother tongues are akin to second languages for one another. But, as Aoki (1987) in citing Gadamer, suggests, “the other world of the second language is always understood, if at all, from the familiar world of the mother language” (p. 242). There is, however, a process of shedding unfamiliarity, over time, as we come to develop a better understanding not only of the language of the other, but also, through coming to know the language, understanding the worldview of the other. We will never know it as we know our mother tongue, but we can understand it, and almost touch it. And there remains a safety that we may always revert to our mother tongue. We understand the world from that position, and we may fall back to it.

*Currere*, as described in Chapter One, subverted the traditional ways of understanding curriculum. It created space for the Reconceptualist movement in the field, an important turning point for subsequent researchers seeking to explore the question of *what knowledge is of most worth?* *Currere* offers “an architecture of self, a self we create and embody as we read, write, speak and listen” (Pinar, 1985, p. 220). *Currere* is a “valuable method for studying one’s subjectivity” (Jung, 2015, p. 26), a necessary foundation to the Intimate Dialogue. While *currere* is the running of the course, the Intimate Dialogue is the building of – and lingering upon – the bridge. The Intimate Dialogue is a means of co-constructing the course as we experience it, reimagining what the course may be, necessarily



*together*. This is its cosmopolitan commitment: the meeting of the self and the beloved other on the bridge of love.

The premise of the Intimate Dialogue starts with the notion that we are connected, that a bridge exists between each of us and the other. As Judith Butler (2005) suggests, “the ‘I’ has no story of its own that is not also the story of a relation – or set of relations – to a set of norms” (p. 8). She, like Derrida in his exploration of the face as a relation from which morality emerges, sees no challenge to the “subjective ground for ethics” (Butler, 2005, p. 8) in this interrelation, but instead sees it as the condition for morality. In this dialogue, then, there is the self and the other, sometimes outwardly one and the same, on a bridge together, imagining one, existing in the imagination of the other. Ibn ‘Arabi, when he conceived of the Intimate Dialogue, thought of it as prayer, a conversation between the lover and the Beloved. Prayer, the crossing of the bridge of love between self and other, between lover and Beloved.

Sometimes, I didn’t like the Beloved that much, but still I prayed.

When I think about the Intimate Dialogue today, it is born out of a state of love, because both who engage in the conversation must recognize their interconnectedness, the reciprocal nature of hospitality. This is the premise of the dialogue, without which, intimacy cannot be met. The lover would not exist without the Beloved’s breath of life. The Beloved would not exist without the lover’s imagination. We do not exist one without the other. Even if we disagree, we have to enter in a state of love. It is this premise of self-love and love of the other that is an enactment of cosmopolitanism.

The Intimate Dialogue blooms slowly. Mum taught me that when she heard me recite my prayers too quickly. Hold your hands out, open them to the sky. Bloom, she urged me. Speak to the Beloved and give the Beloved time and space to respond. Though I was taught

the meaning of the prayers I recited, I didn't really understand what prayer meant. Especially as a child, there wasn't much I needed to *ask* from the Beloved. My challenge lay in the idea that prayer should come when deficit presented itself. There existed in my mind a sense that one only needed to pray to make up the difference of whatever was making life that bit less than perfect, not realizing that something that is perfect is the combination of "completely" and "do" – the ultimate call for us to recognize the perfect life is one that is led by one who does, completely; perhaps lives fully. "For prayer is not a request for something: it is the expression of a mode of being, a means of existing and of *causing to exist*" (Corbin, 1998, p. 248). A prayerful act (Macdonald & Macdonald, 1995) is one that chooses to be in this world in a hopeful way, though hopelessness would be an easier path to walk upon. The Intimate Dialogue is an enactment of this hopeful way of being in this world.

We enter the Intimate Dialogue prayerfully, in a state of hopeful love.

The Intimate Dialogue necessarily happens in a place that enables the conversation to move from its location to the imaginal realm and back into our embodied lives again. It is a place that offers up no place and every place simultaneously. It is the "even there" of Heidegger: "*Kai enthuatha*, "even here," at the stove, in that ordinary place where every thing and every condition, each deed and thought is intimate and commonplace, "even there" *einai theous*, "*the gods themselves are present*" (quoted in Jardine, 2015, p. 233). This could be a Cathedral, a Mosque, or a Synagogue. It could be by the shores of the ocean, or with your feet pressed against the grass. It could be in your kitchen, or another seemingly mundane nook of your home. It is the place that enables you in your dialogue to transcend place and find yourself in the imaginal realm, in the space where you can give an account of yourself freely, without fear of repercussion. When we think of an Intimate Dialogue

between two who are ostensibly adversaries, places of safety that enable transcendence are likely few and far between. The place must be enabling to a state of hopeful love.

It is a space that allows for self-disclosure. The listener must enter into the dialogue “like a lover: to be seduced by the surprising recognition of the struggles, ironies, and desires of others over centuries; to take risks for one’s heart’s desire” (Dodds, 2013, p. 119). The listener is open-hearted, and open-minded. The entry to the imaginal realm together insists on some work to be done. The griever must welcome with hospitality, a stranger to her imaginal realm and offer as a gift her grief. She must be prepared to be vulnerable, to trust that the stranger welcomed into this realm is also entering in a state of love. The stranger is still other. The stranger for his part should be prepared to receive some of the burden of the grief. This is work, and the work continues beyond the dialogue, the heaviness remains. It must.

In the Alid Tradition, the tradition within Islam that follows the teachings of Imam Ali, the cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet, fourth Caliph of the Sunni tradition and first Imam of the Shi’a tradition, there is a concept of carrying the burden for another, and asking of others to carry your burden in the afterlife.

If you find around you such poor, needy and destitute people who are willing to carry your load for you as far as the Day of Judgement then consider this to be a boon, engage them and pass your burden on to them. (Distribute your wealth amongst the poor, destitute and the needy, help others to the best of your ability and be kind and sympathetic to human beings) (Friedlander, 1992, p. 150).

In the literal understanding of this, we can imagine it like a courtroom in which the role of the judge is played by the Beloved. Those you have harmed appear to testify against you, while those whose burdens you have lightened will testify in your favour. In a less literal

sense, it is a question of helping others with the burden of life, the burden of running the course, the burden of grief.

The Intimate Dialogue asks both lover and Beloved to recognize that there is a heaviness each carries, whatever that heaviness may be. This is imperative: grief is what binds us all. Heaviness is experienced by each of us. It is the interpretation of this heaviness that is subjective. We can study our grief to better share it. Likely we *will* study our grief in our lifetime, or at the very least, ruminate on it. In the Intimate Dialogue, we recognize that we dwell in the space where we are touching, but are unable to touch fully; still bound by our skin. We can almost grasp the grief of the other, but not quite. We can listen and come to understand the feeling, but we cannot know it. The Intimate Dialogue is a response to the violence of grief. As Wang (2010) describes:

The root of social and political hierarchy is the mechanism of domination and control. In other words, racism, sexism, classism, homophobia, and other social violence are symptoms of domination which desires to control or even erase the other in order to preserve the self. However, in erasing the other, the self cannot be sustained either (Wang, 2010, p. 2).

Wang's (2010) approach to violence in education, and therefore the violence of our lives, is to approach with a nonviolent frame. Her work informs the approach to the Intimate Dialogue in relation to the curriculum. The Intimate Dialogue is not a violent approach, and does not make use of the language of violence against violence. Words like "combatting violence" or "fighting violence" or even the term "nonviolence." This is intentional. The Intimate Dialogue is a pacifist approach to the violence of grief. It is a choice in the spirit of Toni Morrison's idea that "evil and violence take the stage – all of it. It needs so much to call our attention. But goodness doesn't need anything. If it says anything at all, it's a whisper"

(Morrison, 2013). The Intimate Dialogue is giving voice to that whisper. Intimate's history draws us to the ideas of "put or bring into, drive or press into, to make known, to announce, notify" (OED, 2017). The Intimate Dialogue is then a way for us to press into the grief of the beloved other, and bring the beloved other into our own grief. It cannot be a place where violence has the air to breathe, because violence has already brought the grief, and it has taken all the stage for itself. It is, then, a kind of *active pacifism*, a pacifism that rejects connotations of being passive. Indeed, it is *active* because it is not only choosing to perform nonviolence, but seeks to cultivate peace from within the places of violence. The Intimate Dialogue becomes a catalyst for the transformation of the violence of grief into the lightness of peace.

The lover and the Beloved enter this realm and find ways to give an account of themselves. Perhaps through poetry, perhaps through art, perhaps through prose, perhaps through tears. The lover and the Beloved then echo one another. In their own, unique voice. Origin and echo, echo and origin. This is more than bearing witness to the life and grief of another, it is to hear and then echo in your own voice, to touch grief and perhaps to even taste its intangible sweetness, bitterness, agony. Its scent lingers on your skin for days. It is the experience of greeting grief, and re-greeting it, and in so doing, enlightening both.

### **3.7 Conclusion: Prayerful Attention to Grief**

There are political implications to the responses to grief. As Levinas and Derrida suggest that hospitality, unconditional hospitality, can extend to refugees seeking asylum, the tenuous 'we' that grief creates amongst us can underlie our ways of relating to one another.

The Intimate Dialogue, as a new kind of grief work, occurs in the imaginal realm, where all the senses and the imagination is brought into the act of easing the burden of grief.

In the Intimate Dialogue, born out of the conversation that is prayer between the lover and the Beloved, both the lover and the Beloved enter in a state of love. This does not imply agreement, but a recognition that we are all connected and this recognition urges us to embrace one another. In so doing, we are able to come to understand that this Other before me experiences heaviness, just as I do. Our experience of it is different, our form of heaviness is different, and yet, we can both enlighten the burden of this heaviness through better understanding the grief of the Other. This requires a commitment to hospitality: to recognize that the Other is welcomed into my home, my safe space. It is a risk. Intimacy is always a risk, but to not ever be intimate is an even greater risk.

The Intimate Dialogue is more than an experience of bearing witness to the experiences of another. It is about entering, slowly and gently, through prayer, to the bridge of love upon which we can linger. It is the bridge between the self and other, engaging the senses and the imagination, the spirit of the lover and the Beloved. It is here that we may find ways to give an account of oneself. It is a sensual experience, that engages the limits of touch, pulls the gaze towards one another, suggests tastes and scents, and finds ways for both to originate and echo experiences in both the lover and the Beloved's own voice.

## Chapter 4: The Grief of a Caricaturized History

*It was once asserted by an unkind critic that history does not repeat itself so much as historians repeat one another. Today, the more conventional form is emphatically true. The Spanish Inquisition was until yesterday an antiquarian diversion. The events of the past few years, and above all the past few months, have converted it into a dreadful warning.*

*(Roth, 1937, iii)*

### 4.1 Entanglements

In quantum mechanics there is a phenomenon that is observable in which two objects may exist in different physical spaces, and different times, but are considered to be paired in such a way that any change to one simultaneously creates a change in the other. The communication of the change from one object to the other is so fast that it defies the speed of light. It is so fast that, in some sense, despite what the eye observes and all that seems to be rationally true, these objects that exist in separate times and spaces, can be considered as one.

This phenomenon is called Entanglement.

It is not always clear how objects become entangled. I have often wondered if entanglement has a sound, a crack that has an air of finality to it, but in that crack we may find ourselves existing in a different place, at a different time. In scientific experiments entanglement is often done using lasers, but in everyday life, entanglement happens all around us, without the aid of lasers. Perhaps with a crack. And then, they disentangle. Objects arrive to one another, connect, at times become one, and then depart.

Entanglement itself is a word that draws its history from the sea. It is that thick, coarse seaweed that exists as a “complication of threads, hairs, fibres, branches, boughs, or the like, confusedly intertwined or interlaced, or of a single long thread, line, or rope, involved in coils, loops, and knots” (Entangle, 2015).

## **4.2 To Change History**

I was 14 years old when the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon occurred. September 11, 2001 is a date that most who were alive at the time remember clearly – everyone seems to remember where they were and what they were doing when they heard about the attacks. I was on my way to school. I had started at the school about a week prior, and was still getting used to the nerves and excitement of arriving at school and not really knowing my classmates or teachers. I realized soon after that September 11, 2001 was the day a new era in my experience began: the era of being the Muslim other.

I was confronted swiftly with public mood-shift towards Muslims. Even the principal of my new school wanted to play a part. A class that had been slated as “current affairs” quickly transformed itself into a historical exploration of the Crusades, Saddam Hussain’s use of biological weapons against the Kurds, and the ‘trouble’ with Iran. The affairs were not current so much as they were carefully embedded half-truths buried into the foundation of the narrative of today. The unifying thread was the dehumanization of Islam and Muslims. We only read the Crusade admonitions that called for the destruction of the demon-like Muslims. As the only Muslim in the school, the thread was connected only to me. As my teacher continued to remind my classmates every day, “Samira’s people” were the terrorists who flew planes into buildings.



It didn't take long for me to realize that he probably wasn't the only one who now identified me with these abominable acts of violence. I saw it in the newspapers, and even in the things people said to me when they sometimes didn't know I was Muslim. He articulated to my Muslim face what many others were beginning to think: I was guilty by association. My parents had supported me through the daily struggle I endured with this teacher, deliberately exposing me to scholars within and beyond the Islamic tradition who did not think of Muslims as monsters.

When my family and I eventually made the decision to leave that school and move to a new school, I went to talk to the director of the program. I told him that I was leaving because of the way he had treated me, because of the incessant knots he tied linking me to those who had committed terrible acts of violence. Because of the thousand years of animosity he indelicately placed as a burden on my shoulders so that I was to account for the hate of the past, and the violence of today. His response to me was clear: "Samira, do you want me to change history?" I had struggled all year not to cry in front of this man, but even with all my cards on the table, he was still unable to see what he had done, and in the face of this frustration, I cried.

I loved my new school. I felt free of the daily struggle to remain calm in the face of prejudice, I felt free to be just another student. I made a wonderful group of friends. But I remained nervous that they would find out somehow that I was a Muslim, that somehow that would nullify the friendship that we had forged. Perhaps, looking back on it now, I wasn't free at all.

Eventually my classmates did find out. I'm not sure how or when exactly, but I knew a few months into the school year that I had been caught when someone brought a bible to

school and pressed it against my cheek, and whispered in my ear “I want to see if you will light on fire.” We were in a theatre class. My cheeks did not light on fire, but they burned with the shame of the injustice of the situation, and I felt my eyes well up with tears to cool the fire. There were many things wrong with what he had done, but I most intensely remember feeling that I had been caught in the lie I had been trying to pass off as truth.

I was fifteen years old. and I had learned that being openly Muslim made life just a little bit harder each day. I had to defend myself a little bit more. I had to explain myself a little bit more. Sometimes – often – I felt I had to apologize for being Muslim. So, I tried to hide behind my last name – Thomas, my skin tone, my straightened hair. But, the Bible pressed against my cheek reminded me that in the world of prejudice, there is no hiding.

And, it reminded me that prejudice is nonsense. My father’s family, people I dearly love and hold fully in my identity, were Ministers in the Christian tradition. They were not only devout Christians, but they actively called others to the faith. They did good works in the name of their faith, and even participated in missionary work in Asia and Africa – certainly products of their time and place, but well intentioned, complex beings who wanted goodness for the world around them, and, by all accounts, held fast to the Bible for guidance. Following World War II, my great-grandparents embraced the Quaker faith, premising their religious practice particularly on the value of pacifism. Pacifism and good works were uniting values for my parents, raised in different religious traditions. I was raised in a family life that did not subscribe to a notion of conflict between Christianity and Islam, we have several copies of the Bible in our home, and there was little patience for demonizing any religious group. So, my classmate’s prejudice was nonsense, but it was hurtful nonsense. It was a literal harkening back to a time when some believed that Muslims were truly demons

who walked the earth. The rhetoric of ‘heathens’ lighting on fire when touched by the bible is oddly prevalent and likely dates back to the time of the Crusades if not earlier.

### **4.3 The History I Learned**

Within days of the September 11, 2001 attacks, the director of my new school quickly instituted a new class entitled “Current Affairs” and brought news clippings for us to read. It was a time of public confusion, mourning, and fear. The newspapers were not always thoughtful about the implications of their articles. I remember one in particular pulled at a thread that linked the attacks of 9/11 to a longstanding history of violence in Islam. Writing this today is almost humorous – it is beyond counting how much the prevailing narrative celebrates the notion that there is at the very least something *off* about Islam and Muslims. In the liberal version, we still have to tolerate that *offness*. At this point, I and every Muslim I know has learned to exist as the mistrusted other. For me, it started in school, in our first Current Affairs class. The terrorists were referred to as “Samira’s people” by my teacher that I realized something had changed. I was not seen by the world on my own terms, but by this man’s narrative of me.

It was not an isolated incident. I remember when my classmates and I were told that “Samira’s people flew planes into buildings” attacking freedom, and “Samira’s people blew themselves up in Kashmir to kill Indians,” and when “Samira’s people used biological weapons against the Kurdish people of Iraq.” I suppose, with all of this vitriol, it is absolutely unsurprising that within a month we were, uncritically, examining the Crusades in our Current Affairs class. At the time, I questioned the validity of calling such a study “current,” but now, I recognize wholly that I was experiencing a moment of entanglement.

We read descriptions of Muslims like this one by Robert the Monk:

They thrown down altars, after soiling them with their own filth, circumcise Christians, and pour the resulting blood either on the altars or into the baptismal vessels. When they feel like inflicting a truly painful death on some they pierce their navels, pull out the end of their intestines, tie them to a pole and whip them around it until, all their bowels pulled out, they fall lifeless to the ground. They shoot arrows at others tied to stakes; others again they attack having stretched out their necks, unsheathing their swords to see if they can manage to hack off their heads with one blow. And what can I say about the appalling treatment of women, which is better to pass over in silence than to spell out in detail? (Frankopan, 2012, p. 2).

Instead of drawing parallels and thinking critically about the hate that such narrative produced at the time, we were asked to think uncritically about this work, using it instead to legitimize the current War on Terror and its morally questionable elements. I did attempt to offer an opposing narrative in one of my essays, but was given a failing grade, and told that seeking sources other than the ones given was beyond the scope of the assignment. In another description of Muslims from the time of the Crusades we were asked to read, we were taught that Muslims have horns and look strikingly like the devil. It quickly became a joke in my classroom for my classmates to put their fingers up on their heads, imitating horns, whenever I entered the classroom. And these were my friends – I believe that I was genuinely liked by my classmates, and this was a joke that had emerged from the lessons we were being taught. Perhaps they were jokes that made my friends more comfortable with the discomfort they felt around me now. Perhaps they were jokes that somehow made it alright to be publicly racist. I was taught quickly that academic work in classrooms slips quickly into daily life, and solidifies as acceptable behaviour.

Thinking back on it now, I suppose my classmates were lucky to at least have me in their classroom to disprove the horned-devil theory. I believe it was important for them to

interact with me, and perhaps to see that I, too, am human. Though on the communal level there existed some sense of ‘us’ and ‘them’ - and I was firmly in the ‘them’ category - I believe there were moments when each student, as subjective individuals, broke through the barriers that groupthink tried to build. “Only the individual can see the other person’s tears” (Pinar, 2007, p. 34), and at times, we were just individuals, no labels, no horns. I can only imagine the challenge of moving beyond an education like the one we received, in a less diverse setting. I think of the classrooms of Afghanistan, where students may never meet a Christian or a Jew. I think of my classroom after I left. I think of public discourse without Muslim voices.

I spent much of that school year struggling with my identity. I rejected the association with the attackers, but was told on a daily basis in the media and in my classroom that my personal beliefs did not matter: I adhered to the Muslim faith, and so they were, for all intents and purposes, my people. Except that I am a pacifist. Except that I am privileged because just by looking at me, you wouldn’t know that I’m associated with ‘them’. Because even if my first name belies a connection, my last name oftentimes gets me off the hook. Nonetheless, each day, I arrived at school with a nervous energy and pages of my notebook filled with paragraphs I had meticulously crafted the night before and written to read to my teacher in case I became tongue-tied in the moment. I learned about the difference between inner *jihad* and outer *jihad*, the latter being more commonly used today in the media surrounding political Islam. I learned about Salman Rushdie and what it meant to issue a *fatwa* against someone, and, perhaps, more importantly, why this had nothing to do with me or the religion in which I was raised. In the midst of all of the political angles taken on Islam, I struggled to remember that none of these things had played a role at all in my religion, in

my practice of my religion. Answering for the actions of others was an impossible struggle I met each day, and when I arrived home again, bested by my teacher who inevitably found ways to discredit my carefully crafted thoughts, I turned to my notebook again.

I was frustrated. The bewilderment and hurt I felt towards my teacher's insistence of my violence was matched by my bewilderment and hurt I felt towards those who *were* committing acts of violence in the name of Islam. I have never associated with this brand of Islam, and it is certainly a *brand* with a public relations machinery and a message it wants to assert. My time in the refugee camps in the summers before – and after – the attacks had brought me face-to-face with the lived reality of this kind of politics, this ugly notion of religion. That such cruelty could exist in the world became a kind of calling to me; I wanted to find ways to let light in to push away the darkness. It had never occurred to me that what the Taliban espoused was *Islam*, because it was so deeply foreign to the Islam in which I was raised, the Islam that I loved. To me, they were cruel and violent people who wanted power by any means, just like the cruel and violent people anywhere else in the world, at any time in history. But we are not living at *any* time in history. *This* is our time. In my teenage years, and through my twenties, I have lived and watched as Islam has been torn up from within *and* beyond, the two narratives feeding off of one another, racing into the heart of this nightmare.

My academic life since this point in time has been reflected in Toni Morrison's words:

The function, the very serious function of racism is distraction. It keeps you from doing your work. It keeps you explaining, over and over again, your reason for being. Somebody says you have no language, so you spend twenty years proving that you do. Somebody says your head isn't shaped properly, so you have scientists working

on the fact that it is. Somebody says you have no art, so you dredge that up. Somebody says you have no kingdoms, so you dredge that up. None of that is necessary. There will always be one more thing (Morrison, 1975).

I understand that there may always be one more thing, and yet, I cannot help but spend, quite literally almost twenty years of my life proving that I do have history. It began that first day I was told that my history was violence, sneakiness, and devilish behaviour.

So, I started studying. Around the time of the Crusades, there was a civilization blooming that, at first blush, seemed to *prove* something about Islam: the civilization of Al-Andalus. For me, this civilization, and particularly one place, the Alhambra Palace in Granada, represented something more for me.

I came home one day, soon after I had started my doctoral studies. I was living with my parents in Vancouver, and my mother, who was also completing her doctoral work at the time, was in the kitchen preparing a meal. I stood by my mother at the stove. When I think back to my childhood and the places I grew up, this place, at my mother's side as we stood by the stove was an almost daily ritual we shared. We talked as we prepared dinner together. Our conversation wandered away from research, inched into the places we had visited and the traumatic landscapes we had seen together, the places we longed to visit again, and then, we spoke about the Alhambra, a 13<sup>th</sup> century palace built by the Muslim rulers – the Moors – of southern Spain that my sister, mother and I had visited more than ten years prior. Why did we care so much about it? And why do six thousand people visit this place each day?

I believe that part of the answer is that it has attained world heritage status. Though locally situated, it seems to have a universal relevance. But for us, the Alhambra was more than a world heritage site, it was a site of *our* heritage, recognized by the world. It was, and

remains, a source of pride. For many European and North American Muslims, and Muslims globally, there is a great deal of nostalgia associated with the time of the Moors, which has created, in some, an almost mythic love for what the Alhambra represents. It was a symbol of the potential of Islam and the ‘West’ not only coexisting peacefully, but dwelling more fervently on the bridge between what many see as two incompatible worlds. For me, in my early teenage years, I believed it was a physical reminder of the possibility for a Western Islamic identity. The Alhambra was too beautiful to be destroyed by subsequent non-Muslim rulers. I clung to this belief. There is a kind of mythology about the Alhambra in the Muslim world, and perhaps beyond. It is a mythology of utopia, of Jew, Christian, and Muslim living together, over hundreds of years, in a society of peace and intellectual enlightenment. I felt that if only my classmate with his Bible could know about *these* Muslims, maybe he would not see his book as a weapon against me.

I have come to realize, through study, that though the Alhambra is a beautiful place that holds precious history, its lessons are far more complex than what nostalgia and mythology may suggest. It is not frozen in time as a relic of the Muslim past, but a place that holds the past and the present simultaneously. It does not represent a Muslim utopia, or only a failure of Muslim leadership and unity. The Alhambra, instead, is a monument to the complexity of society: the good and the bad. It reflects a time of tension between Christianity and Islam, and a time of tension within Islam between interpretations of the faith and the ways in which those interpretations manifested themselves politically. It was born in a time not unlike ours today. The Alhambra, a palace built thousands of miles from my home, centuries before I was born, is deeply entangled with the moment my cheeks burned against my classmate’s Bible.



#### **4.4 Proof of Civilization: Al-Andalus and the Alhambra**

The time of Al-Andalus is a time that is generally marked as the years 711 C.E. to 1492 C.E. when there existed Muslim rule in Iberia, what is today Southern Spain and Portugal (Kennedy, 1996). Historical accounts of the arrival of the Muslims to Spain differ, some painting the image of tyrannical warriors (Downey, 2014), while others offer evidence that the ruling Visigoths of the mid-eighth century were struggling to maintain kingdoms, leading to agreements between the Visigoths and Muslims, who subsequently became rulers of the kingdoms (BBC, 2005). There is likely truth to both versions.

Al-Andalus, in the early eighth century, existed at the far western edges of known civilization according to existing historical sources, and was a relatively inconsequential provincial outpost of the wider Ummayyad Islamic civilization which stretched from what is today Morocco to the western edges of China (Menocal, 2009). In 750 C. E., a revolution in Damascus, the center of the Ummayyad power, led to a massacre of the Ummayyad ruling family, and the eventual rise of the Abbasid Empire, first housed in Syria and later established firmly in the Abbasid-built city of Baghdad (Berkey, 2002). While the massacre wiped out the majority of the ruling family, one young man managed to escape. Abd al-Rahman, a prince of the Ummayyad Caliphate and therefore a descendant of the Prophet Muhammad on his paternal side, fled Damascus with his mother, a Berber, and was presumed dead until five years later, when he reappeared in Cordoba, the capital of the al-Andalus outpost (Menocal, 2009). The combination of Ummayyad and Berber heritage offered him both political legitimacy and popular support, particularly with the largely Berber Andalusian population. Despite the Abbasid rule in Damascus, the Ummayyads still

maintained a sense of legitimacy through their ties to the Prophet Muhammad (Menocal, 2009).

In the years that followed, Al-Andalus grew to become a center of civilization and growth in its own right, as Abd al-Rahman and his descendants sought to compete with the Abbasid and Fatimid Empires to the East. Competition at this time, however, was not simply for land acquisition, but for the possession of wisdom. Between the *Bayt al-Hikma*, the House of Wisdom, established in Baghdad under the Abbasid caliphate; *Al-Azhar*, possibly the first university in the world, built in Cairo by the Fatimid caliphate; and the Cordoba Library established by the Ummayyad caliphate, these three empires were able to advance knowledge in such a way that they have had lasting impacts on our world today, in fields as diverse as philosophy, arts, technology, and medicine (Morgan, 2008). It is through these centers that the Greek, Indian, and Chinese philosophical traditions were translated for us in the Western world, and it is through the new ways of thinking that these centers of learning established that the European Renaissance was born (Morgan, 2008). It was also the time and place of conversation between the three monotheistic religions. All three centers had the particular commonality that religious background was not a reason to preclude anyone from becoming a scholar – and it was likely this religious and ethnic diversity that created the conditions for the high caliber of scholarship that was produced. It was from the Spanish Muslim empire that Maimonides, one of the most respected Jewish scholars, emerged. Thomas Aquinas, one of the founders of modern philosophy and a giant in the Christian tradition, relied heavily on the work of Ibn Rushd, a scholar from Cordoba. In the Sufi tradition, the work of the Andalusian Ibn ‘Arabi remains fundamental to this day. While diversity was prized, and it is possible that noblewomen were involved with scholarship,

their names are more difficult to find, leaving open the question of the inclusion of women in intellectual life. It was a time when the rest of Europe was mired in the Middle Ages, a time of declining intellectual exploration which often made Christian Europe unthreatening to the Muslim Empire that was enjoying its apex of cultural and intellectual dominance.

The Islamic empire of Al-Andalus was often in flux and, to be very specific, was not a singular empire at all, but rather several kingdoms, each with leadership transitioning frequently from one tribe to another, and even one family member to another following sometimes bloody coups. Under five different Muslim regimes of Al-Andalus between the middle of the tenth to the end of the twelfth century, there were six different mass book burnings that marked the shift in political power (Safran, 2014) defining which ideas were acceptable and which were deemed unsafe. This is a practice that has been mirrored by many totalitarian and insecure regimes since, including that of Nazi Germany, the Taliban of Afghanistan, and the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria. Perhaps as a result of these book burnings, no official archival records exist from within the Andalusian kingdoms, though they do exist from historians who lived in neighbouring kingdoms. As is often the case, these documents tend to be more illuminating on the beliefs and views of neighbouring kingdoms than those of Al-Andalus. Through literary study, legal study, and architectural study, scholars have been able to develop a sense of the thought that flourished at this time.

The current tension between those Muslims who struggle in the name of peace and those who prefer a path of war is one that existed in the time of Al-Andalus, as well. It is particularly evident in comparing the kingdoms of Al-Andalus that sought the establishment of an empire through peaceful coexistence and those who craved expansion of territory in the name of Islam. The proclivity to be peaceful or violent does not emerge from a religious

belief, but is one that is born out of the inner self and the circumstances in which a person was raised. It is perhaps because of this tension that we may learn something by looking to the moments in which cosmopolitanism and generosity of spirit triumphed over the calls for fear and suspicion of the Other. It is also an important tension to understand for Muslims today, those like the Afghan student I met, that they may recognize that Islam is not a monolith and the Islamic community is as diverse as the number of people who ascribe to it.

Within the Islamic world, there existed subversions to the prevailing powers that preferred literal understandings of the faith over esoteric approaches. One such group was the *Brethren of Purity*, a group of intellectuals whose identity remains a mystery, operating in Basra around the 10<sup>th</sup> or 11<sup>th</sup> century under leadership that, at that time, considered their views heretical (Baffioni, 2010). The Brethren is best known for their encyclopedic letters that unified topics as diverse as mathematics, music, philosophy, and the nature of animals under the umbrella of Islamic mysticism. Their integrative approach to the works of philosophers and scholars of non-Muslim origin into the framework of Islam demonstrated an intellectual approach to faith that threatened the hegemonic powers in Iraq at the time. It also demonstrated an inclusiveness and a cosmopolitan ethic that was embedded in their work. Fundamental to the Brethren's philosophy of the 'perfect city' was the idea that "mutual love is the basis and goal of the community" (Baffioni, 2010). Their work offered the builders of the Alhambra inspiration, not only in the marriage of "Pythagorean numerology to Islamic science and mysticism" (Sardar & Yassin-Kassab, 2013, p. 37), but also in making mutual love the basis of the Alhambra. In particular, the Brethren took on the concept of the microcosm-macrocosm, the idea that the entirety of the universe is contained within each human body (and perhaps, indeed in each part of existence) and that the universe

itself, though vast is ultimately a single reality. This cosmology appears in Pythagorean thought and the Brethren integrated the notion into their epistles, creating the most elaborate form of Muslim Neo-Pythagoreanism (Takeshita, 1986). Their philosophy was that the universe could become knowable through reason, study, and knowledge. This idea, coupled with the intellectual interdisciplinary approach to knowledge that existed, enabled the arts and architecture to become allegorical of the cosmological thought of the time, creating a “sense of integrated spatiality that brings cosmology, geography, the human body, and architecture together, allowing them to be seen in terms of one another without the need of theoretical mediation” (Akkach, 2012, xix).

The Alhambra, particularly the Nasrid palaces that were built with thought to the Brethren of Purity and other Sufi scholars, offers a physical allegory to the philosophical underpinnings these scholars put forth. It becomes, then, a story to be read, and, in the case of this dissertation, a participant in the Intimate Dialogue of mutual love.

The Alhambra offers a representation of the tension and cooperation, both within the Islamic community, as well as between Islam and Christianity. Built towards the end of the Moorish rule in Al-Andalus, beginning in the late 13<sup>th</sup> century, it was one of the final lasting acts of the Islamic presence in Spain. Though referred to as a palace complex, the experience of it today is much more that of a small city, complete with hotels, restaurants and gardens. The Alhambra looms heavily over the city of Granada, acting as an ever-present backdrop to city life.

Within the Alhambra complex today, there are three primary areas: the Alcazaba, the Nasrid Palaces, and the Generalife gardens. Broadly, the Alcazaba was part of the original fortress that is thought to have existed from the 9<sup>th</sup> century, though there is speculation that a

fortress existed on the same site from Roman times. The Alcazaba appears to have served a military function, built as a fortress with residences for the royal guard. The Alcazaba today is largely an undecorated space whose beauty is derived from the vistas it offers of Granada in all directions. There is a garden along the south side of the Alcazaba called the Jardín de los Advares that many tourists pass through quickly in a rush to get to the Nasrid Palaces or elsewhere in the large Alhambra complex. Over the course of my research at the Alhambra, this space quickly became one of my favourite places to visit to take a respite from the masses of people in the rest of the palace grounds.

While the Alhambra finds pockets of gardens, even in the fortress, it also had a dedicated garden called the Generalife, which was both a small farm to produce food for the Alhambra's residents as well as a pleasure garden filled with flowers. The design of the Generalife today is quite different from what it is likely to have been at the time it was built as a result of years of neglect.

It is difficult for many to write of the Nasrid Palaces without becoming nostalgic or orientalist, and I recognize this challenge in my own words. In this space, I felt the poetic metaphors and the allegory etched in the walls come to life. Author Hanan al-Shaykh describes her experience of visiting the Alhambra in her Winternachten Lecture in 2013:

I remember when I visited Al-Hambra in Granada, Andalusia, how I was overwhelmed by the sophistication of our ancestors. I wrote an essay entitled 'In the court of the lions I sat down and wept, thank you Elizabeth Smart', no, I didn't weep because the Arabs were no longer in charge of Granada but because we Arabs today have no connection with the Arabs of Andalusia, with those who, having borrowed the pens and chisels of angels, carved and embellished Islamic architecture to such melodious perfection... Why is it that we didn't complete our cultural journey, and how is it that we have ended up today in the very worst of times? What is it that made our predecessors pore over their desks, writing down and recording the

marvels of mathematics and science and searching out the skies with the stars and constellations in order to discover their secrets, and, driven by the love of knowledge, to study medicine and to devise medicaments even from the stomach of bees and this was Iraq in the 8th century (al-Shaykh, 2013).

Standing in the Court of the Lions, there were moments when the seemingly endless stream of people would find a lull, when I would press myself to put down the camera in my hands, and just be present in the space. Perhaps my awe in this space was inspired by the philosophy that is ingrained in the design of the Nasrid palaces, what al-Shaykh describes as borrowing “the pens and chisels of angels” (al-Shaykh, 2013). Perhaps that tinge of sadness I felt in this space was due to what al-Shaykh saw as an incomplete cultural journey. In the Nasrid palaces, it feels easy to forget the turmoil of the world around the Alhambra as it was built: not only were the Nasrids seeking aid from the Merenids in North Africa and paying the Kingdom of Castille for protection, but they were also experiencing instability in leadership following coups and fratricide (Sardar and Yassin-Kassab, 2013, p. 37). I stood in the hall, and thought that in the midst of this instability and uncertainty, someone thought to write a book for future generations to pick up and continue, and instead of risking taking pen to paper that would have almost certainly been burned after 1492, the book was written as a building too beautiful to destroy. Instead of writing a book that might pass through time like a whisper, they had to construct a building that we would not dare ignore.

Some consider it remarkable that the Alhambra was not destroyed after King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella took power in 1492. It is perhaps, remarkable, though it was consistent with the behavior at the time, which largely involved new rulers usurping existing buildings and repurposing them for new roles. Under the Islamic rule, churches that were no longer used were repurposed as mosques, or split in half, creating a Muslim prayer space and

a Christian prayer space within the same building. Following the Reconquista, many mosques were repurposed as churches, the most famous (and recently controversial) of which is the Grand Mosque of Cordoba, now named the Cathedral of Cordoba. After 1492, King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella set about to make changes to the Alhambra that it may pay homage to its new leadership. This took the form of minor changes, including inscriptions in their honour, the letters F and Y appear often throughout the buildings, and Christian imagery is evident at various points throughout the site. Their grandson, Charles V, felt that the Alhambra lacked a strong statement by the new rulers, and rectified this by building a new palace on the grounds, and laying the groundwork for a new church to be built where the Royal Mosque had once stood, but had been destroyed following the expulsion of the Moors.

The Treaty of Granada, signed by Boabdil and Isabella and Ferdinand in 1492 protected Muslims and Jews who chose to stay in Andalusia, from forced conversions or persecution. The Alhambra becomes a point of entanglement when we consider that within eight months of the agreement, all Jews were expelled or forced to convert to Christianity, and “within a decade Cardinal Ximenes had persuaded Isabella to issue a decree that offered the Muslims the choice between conversion and exile” (Irwin, 2005, p. 25). Within a decade, Muslims and Jews who had once flourished in Spain were given the devastating decision between facing the Inquisition, renouncing their own faith, or making a home in a new land. Perhaps more importantly, the both imagined and real threat of Muslim and Jewish thought led to the burning of books in an attempt to eliminate the threat of ideas deemed too dangerous to exist. Monuments and museums pepper the Andalusian landscape to remember the cruelty that was visited upon the Other during this period. The Alhambra survived this



destruction, and somehow managed to survive through years of neglect, an explosion of gunpowder, and the tourists who etched their names into the walls and stole tiles to put on display in their homes.

The complex history of Al-Andalus is important to me. It is important because I have been told things like that “Muslims are violent” that our culture is that of despots, that our civilization invariably lends itself to dictators like Saddam Hussein or terrorists like Osama bin Laden. It is important to me because in the increasingly frequent instances of mistrust of myself and my loved ones who are Muslim, I have needed to hold fast to the knowledge that what we are overwhelmingly told in politics and popular culture today is categorically untrue. It is important to me because I have seen the nuance: no civilization is perfect. There were Muslims who ascribed to violence back then, just as there were Christians who did the same. There were Muslims who ascribed to peace and love, just as there were Christians who did the same. These realities are true today, as well.

#### **4.4.1 The Crusades and the Reconquista**

In 2001, just after the attacks on the World Trade Center, it seemed – and it was – malicious to be reading the words of Robert the Monk from centuries ago in a Current Affairs class. Today, looking back on it, I realize that though my instructor had the worst intentions (these works were never looked at critically; my grades suffered whenever I offered a critical voice to texts like this one), he was not incorrect in recognizing the narrative that was quickly being built around me. The words of Robert the Monk could have been written days ago. Despite long periods of peace and joyful coexistence, it was politically expedient to add to the narrative that Islam and Christianity have been at odds

from the beginning of time and that this was merely a continuation of the centuries-long ‘clash of civilizations’ (Huntington, 1996).

While the ‘clash of civilizations’ theory has been widely discredited (Said, 2001), Islam has long suffered the frustration and suspicion of the Western world. As Jonathan Lyons (2014) describes:

The formation of this anti-Islam discourse, like the history of madness, is the history of difference imposed from without. Any internal attributes of Islam, its meaning for its adherents, its worldview, its religious dogmas, and so on – that is, Islam qua Islam – are irrelevant and can be safely ignored. Thus Foucault might just as easily be addressing the West’s emergent narrative of Islam and the Muslims instead of madness when he writes in *The Order of Things*: ‘The history of madness would be the history of the other – of that which, for a given culture, is at once anterior and foreign, therefore to be excluded (so as to exorcise the interior danger) but by being shut away (in order to reduce its otherness)...’” (Lyons, 2014, p. 48).

Islam became, and has become in some circles, like madness. Lock us away, keep us out of the schools, neighbourhoods, and relationships of your families, your children. During the Crusades, it became a religious imperative to actively travel abroad to convert and take land from Muslims. It was this rhetoric that found its way to Spain in the 15<sup>th</sup> Century.

It was this mentality that fueled Isabella, the young Princess of Castille, to seek to purify Spain through the Reconquista (the re-conquest of Spain from Muslim rulers to bring Spain fully under her rule) and the Inquisition, which sought to cleanse Spain of Jews, Muslims, and even Christians who did not fit within the monarch’s understanding of Catholicism (Edwards, 2000; Weissberger, 2004; Liss, 1992). She maintained a mentality that made permissible the conquest of foreign lands, the degradation of the people and cultures of those lands, and the requirement of their conversion to Christianity. She was not

the first to do this, nor was the Christian church. But, these specific actions had repercussions that we continue to feel, centuries on. It was the first step in the European colonial project that came to a head in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Five hundred years after Isabella's rule, there are still those, across religions, who feel that those with different worldviews are enough of a threat that they must be eliminated, this is, in part, due to one of the more significant decisions Queen Isabella made: sponsoring Christopher Columbus' journey to India.

On January 2, 1492, Christopher Columbus watched as Queen Isabella and King Ferdinand of Spain conquered the Alhambra Palace, the final bastion of the Moors in Spain, and sent the Moorish King into exile. It was in the shade of the Alhambra's arches that Columbus was commissioned by the Queen to explore a new route to India. Charged with the mission of both converting the Indians to Christianity, and in so doing, expanding the reach of Christendom, as well as seeking a quicker route for trade, Columbus set sail under the banner of the Queen. In the opening of the journal of his first voyage at sea six months after the expulsion of the Jews of Andalusia, Columbus captures this moment and its ensuing ramifications for the people of Andalusia:

In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ  
Because, O most Christian, and very high, very excellent, and  
puissant Princes, King and Queen of the Spains and of the islands of  
the Sea, our Lords, in this present year of 1492, after your Highnesses  
had given an end to the war with the Moors who reigned in Europe,  
and had finished it in the very great city of Granada, where in this  
present year, on the second day of the month of January, by force of  
arms, I saw the royal banners of your Highnesses placed on the towers  
of Alfambra, which is the fortress of that city, and I saw the Moorish  
King come forth from the gates of the city and kiss the royal hands of  
your Highnesses, and of the Prince my Lord, and presently in that  
same month, acting on the information that I had given to your  
Highnesses touching the lands of India... Your Highnesses, as  
Catholic Christians and Princes who love the holy Christian faith, and  
the propagation of it, and who are enemies to the sect of Mahoma and

to all idolatries and heresies, resolved to send me, Cristóbal Colon, to the said parts of India to see the said princes, and the cities and lands, and their disposition, with a view that they might be converted to our holy faith; and ordered that I should not go by land to the eastward, as had been customary, but that I should go by way of the west, whither up to this day, we do not know for certain that any one has gone.

Thus, after having turned out all the Jews from all your kingdoms and lordships, in the same month of January, your Highnesses gave orders to me that with a sufficient fleet I should go to the said parts of India, and for this they made great concessions to me, and ennobled me... (Columbus, 2003, pp. 89 - 90).

The expulsion of the Moorish rule, and perhaps in particular, the horrific treatment of Jewish Andalusians, was viewed as a success of the *Reconquista* - Queen Isabella and King Ferdinand's efforts to reconquer Spain for Christendom - is a moment of lingering significance in our world today. It is a testament to the thorough work of the Crusading rhetoric and the Reconquista that, when anti-Islamic sentiment in Canada was sparked once again, it made a young boy bring a Bible to school to see if his classmate would erupt into flames.

## **4.5 Colonialism and Culpability**

### **4.5.1 I am Indigenous**

Since 1492, each year, the city of Granada, which the Alhambra overlooks, observes *Moros y Cristianos*, a festival of song, dance, and food that reenacts the defeat of the Muslims – the Moors, *Moros* – in Spain by the Christian – *Cristianos* - armies. Columbus traveled to the Americas with more than his cargo; he came with visions of what we now call cultural genocide. In the Spain that he admired and had recently left, he held the belief that the expulsion of the Jews and Muslims was a noble and good decision on the part of the

monarchs. With Columbus' arrival, the Inquisition spread beyond the borders of Spain or even Europe. Columbus believed that his mission to India was not only to improve the routes of trade, but also to enculturate his own values and beliefs in the Indian population, Muslim and Hindu, alike. It is at the moment of Columbus' first sighting of land that the fate of the indigenous peoples of South (and indeed, North) America and that of Muslims and Jews, became entangled. The people he met were Other, just as the Muslims and Jews were Other.

The tradition of *Moros y Cristianos* with its variety of plays, dances, and reenactments, was carried over to the New World by the 17<sup>th</sup> century, and is still celebrated annually in Mexico, Guatemala, Panama, Colombia, and even in the Philippines. As with any complex history, there are many ways to think of this tradition. There is the surface level understanding of good vanquishing evil, communicating a need or desire to defeat the Moors, a people that the colonized people of the Americas had likely not encountered when this tradition was first brought over (Harris, 2000). It acted as a further reinforcement of the idea that the Spaniard colonists were a representation of the 'good.' The content of the plays not only represented the Moors and the Spanish Christians, but also depicted other battles in which other European Christians fought the Turks and Arabs in the Ottoman empire, through the Crusades, and in other battles that spanned the medieval period (Harris, 2000). Over time, the festival has taken on a variety of meanings, and has adapted to the historical moment:

In addition, most of the Moors carried trussed provisions on their backs: a long loaf of French bread; grapes, lettuce, radishes, peppers, corn, and other fruits and vegetables; a bottle of wine; and a miniature bottle of brandy or rum. By doing so, they signaled that they also represented Zouaves, members of a French light-infantry corps that had taken part in the unsuccessful French attack on Puebla (5 May 1862) celebrated by Mexicans each year on the national holiday of Cinco de Mayo. Together with the Christian soldiers who wore nineteenth-century Mexican uniforms, the Zouaves added the

national victory over the French at Puebla to the morismas' official repertoire of more distant historical and legendary referents. Moreover, since the unit was named after its original recruits—members of the warlike Zouaouah tribe who had been pressed into service after the French colonization of Algeria in 1830—the Zouaves were arguably both French and Moors. Moorish costumes in the French colors of red, white, and blue embraced both identities. Folk theater is typically rich in this kind of multiple reference (Harris, 2000, pp. 6 – 7).

In its adaptability, it seems that a narrative of centuries of war against the ambiguously defined Moor is easily crafted. Many of the plays performed during *Moros y Cristianos*, particularly the comedies, ended with the Moor seeking baptism (Hendrix, 1920). Not all reenactments end with a gleeful conversion – others end with the beheading of the Moor in the local chapel (Harris, 2000, p. 3), drawing another reading of this festival: the preservation of the Church, taking the festival as an opportunity to tell the stories of John the Baptist, Christian saints, and heroes of Christian battles.

Perhaps the most telling narrative of this celebration, particularly in the colonized lands of the Americas, is the one told in the music, rather than the words and actions of the *Moros y Cristianos* festival. In the Guatemalan highlands, traditional musical forms and instruments that had been banned by the colonialists were, perhaps surreptitiously, integrated into the festival dances. When the colonialists arrived in Guatemala, there had already existed a warrior dance form called the K'iche', as described by ethnomusicologist Mark Howell (2009):

Possibly this dance, unlike sacrifice bailes such as the *Rab'inal Achi*, was regarded as a significant enough threat to fledgling Spanish hegemony to be marked early on for eradication. But if, as theorized, the K'iche' transferred some of its Precolumbian components to the *Moros* (a Spanish-introduced warrior dance), one such component could have been the requisite instrumentation for warrior dances: again, the flute and drum (Howell, 2009, p. 282).

The significance, of this possible transference is important, not only as a means of preserving an important cultural tradition that remained undetected by colonizers (Howell, 2009, p. 296), but that it also created space for entanglement between the indigenous peoples of Guatemala and the Moors. In a sense, the clandestine act of integrating pre-Colombian traditions into the Moorish part of the *Moros y Cristianos* festival offered Guatemalans a way to represent their own struggle in colonialism, using the Moors as the mask for their own experience. This act of subversion appears to be true in Mexico, as well:

The *morismas* have a political significance. In a colonial or post-colonial situation, indigenous practices suppressed by the colonial power take on a new meaning. What was once dominant becomes subversive. Such practices can therefore be used, without any necessary adherence to the cultural and religious values that they once expressed, as potent symbols of resistance to present subjugation. Those in Mexico who now feel marginalized by the national government, by the rapid process of urbanization, and by market forces that seem to benefit only the wealthy might well identify with indigenous predecessors who were conquered by forces they neither invited nor understood (Harris, 2000).

Thinking back to Columbus who seemed to have started this all, I realized that just as the Indigenous communities of Latin America have seen themselves in the *morismas*, I too – and other Muslims – can see ourselves in the Indigenous peoples of the world. Columbus made clear in his diary that the aim of his journey was to travel to India in order to convert the population to Christianity. Columbus even states categorically that he is doing so in the name of the enemies of the “sect of Mahoma,” (Columbus, 2003, pp. 89 - 90) a term used to describe Muslims. *We* were who Columbus was coming for. That someone else was caught up in the process and all but wiped off the face of both existence and history is not only

tragic, but calls forth a recognition that though Islam and indigeneity in the Americas may seem on the surface to dwell lightyears apart, our histories are more entangled than we may imagine. Entangled in ways that go beyond the signs “We Are All Muslims Now” that were held at anti-Trump rallies across America.

#### **4.5.2 I am not Indigenous**

Colonization is formally over in much of the Muslim world, though many would argue that there are forms of political and economic coercion that mimic the colonial past in these parts of the world. But, colonization is not over in the Americas. I came to this realization slowly.

When I was in grade five, I started attending a school in North Vancouver. It was about an hour drive from my home, so each day my mother would drive me there and back home. We would cross the Second Narrows bridge each day, driving almost directly over a reservation. I asked about this in school, and one of my teachers told me “Canada used to be theirs. When Europeans came to Canada, they took this land and gave the natives small parcels of land to live on instead.” I asked why this was still the case and his response is one that seems to sum up the problem with power: “Your home is on land that was taken, do you want to give up your home for them?” This conversation, coupled with a short textbook read-out loud exercise one day in class about the fur trade was the extent of my understanding of the First Nations of Canada. My teacher’s words should have been enough for me to realize that I was contributing, participating, and actively supporting a colonial project. But, the tone with which he said it was less about my culpability and more about *them* moving into my home. It was only after a trip to Haida Gwaii in 2012 that I came to really appreciate that



there was a civilization before the Europeans arrived. I had been, for so long, part of the problem. I had been blind to the language, the art, the kingdoms, the rich, rich history that exists in Canada's First Nations. It wasn't in my curriculum, and the invisibility of our indigenous people in my upbringing is horrifying to me. There is so much left to learn.

I am not indigenous. In some sense I am not indigenous to anywhere. I have, for the most part, seen this as a blessing. A kind of invitation to be indigenous to everywhere. I was born in Vancouver, so the coast of British Columbia always *feels* like home. Even in the rain. I've always been certain that if my soul were to be crafted on earth, it would be that landscape.

My mother was born in Uganda. Her parents were born in India and fled to Uganda during the bloody and brutal Partition between India and Pakistan following the end of British colonization of the Sub-Continent. She had always wanted to visit India, but only got to set foot on its soil in 2005 on the tarmac of New Delhi airport for about 20 minutes. One of the airport guards gave her a rose just because and she pressed it to her nose like she was trying to remember its scent. She grew up in England after a long and harrowing journey that took her as a young girl from Uganda to Pakistan, and then by train across Asia to England. England, where my father's family is from. We have a family tree dating back to the 1500s; all of them were English. Create-a-new-kind-of-sweet-pea English. We have documentation that my great grandfather did find a way to breed a new sweet pea to quite the celebration in the British pea community (this causes my sister and I no end of amusement that we could possibly be *that* British). My paternal ancestors did fight in the wars, and chose, following the horrors of war that Never Again was an appropriate sentiment, and, taking that to heart, became Quaker. My great-grandmother was a sharp-witted woman, and one of the first

female doctors in the country. She was hungry to see the world and to contribute to it. She ended up in China as part of a Christian medical mission; a mission that her letters reveal she was not too fond of, but continued on because important medical work needed to be done. Her brother was equally worldly, and chose to go to South Africa with a Christian mission. My father's paternal grandfather was also part of a Christian mission in South Africa, where my grandfather was born. There is a certain earnestness to the work of my great-grandparents. In the letters and stories I hold from them, they loved the world and sought to do good for it and its people. And I believe that they did through kindness and talent. I also recognize that they were active participants in the colonial projects of the nations they visited, whether they agreed with colonization or not. Knowing this for them is an important recognition for myself as well.

I am not indigenous because I have not had the same upbringing, the same lived experiences, nor do I hold the same stories as those who do identify as indigenous. I do not *know* what it is to be indigenous. But, the grief of being misrepresented and underrepresented in the curriculum: that, I understand.

I have also come to realize something strange and profound: for sixteen years, I have felt each time a Muslim does something violent in the world that I must somehow apologize for their acts, though I do not identify with them in any way shape or form. I do not believe we adhere to the same faith, I do not relate to them culturally, or spiritually. I absolutely do not relate to them by their violent acts. I hold fast to the notion that as humans we have all have responsibilities to one another. And yet, they have been "Samira's people" who I must answer for, and publicly renounce. When people asked me what my faith was I would reluctantly, and embarrassedly say "I'm Muslim... but not *that* Muslim." Not Muslim

enough to be a threat to anyone. My great-grandparents were part of the British colonial machinery, possibly one of the most profoundly harmful things the world has endured with lasting implications that we still grapple with today. My *family*. And yet, I have never once been made to feel guilty for their part in this colossal historic violence. I have never had to say “I hold a British passport, but I’m not *that* British. Not British enough to colonize your lands and strip you of your sense of worth and culture.” Never once have I been made to feel guilty for living out a colonial dream in my home on unceded territory. People already see the nuance in this heritage. Guilt is not something that I believe we should ever be made to feel for any of our identities. But, I do recognize the imbalance of blindness I and others around me hold when it comes to my guilt by association. This is my privilege, and also my grief.

## Chapter 5: Lemonade

*“We think back through our mothers, if we are women” (Woolf, 1929, p. 75)*

*what  
massacre  
happens to my son  
between  
him  
living within my skin  
drinking my cells  
my water  
my organs  
and  
his softy psyche turning cruel  
does he not remember  
he  
is half woman  
-from  
(Waheed, 2013, p. 8)*

### 5.1 Formation

In 2002, a woman in Washington state found herself in a strange situation: she and her children had their DNA tested, and they were not a match. She remembered conceiving them, carrying them in her womb, feeling them kick for the first time, and then, eventually, pushing them out of her body and into the world. She had documentation to prove that she had indeed given birth to two children. If it had been just one child, perhaps the question would be a hospital mix-up, a switched at birth situation. But this was not the case. *Neither* of her children was not a child-mother match for her DNA. The DNA test had been administered by the government the process of determining the woman’s welfare eligibility. To complicate matters further, she was pregnant with her third child. The government determined the best course of action would be to send a government official into the delivery

room and administer the DNA test under impartial supervision. As it turned out, the mother again was not a DNA match for the child that had just left her womb.

Science caught up with this phenomenon soon after, determining that the woman was a chimera, a person with two sets of DNA. In Ancient Greek tradition, a *chimera* was a creature that had a lion's head, a goat's body, and a serpent's tail. Often, the chimera is depicted as breathing fire and being a harbinger of disaster. In the case of the woman in Washington, it was not a disaster, but a realization of her own history; it was the history of the womb. When she was conceived, another egg was also fertilized. Had things turned out differently, this would have been her twin. Instead, as happens on occasion, her zygote absorbed the zygote of her potential twin, creating a single individual with two sets of DNA. She, quite biologically, had a stranger living within her.

This phenomenon does not only exist in the context of absorbing a potential twin. Microchimerism, for example, happens in virtually the entire population. It is the same as chimerism, but at a smaller scale. It is most frequent, again, in the womb, but is often the cells of the mother and the fetus that are passed between one another. When a baby is born, some of her cells remain and live within her mother, and her mother's cells enter the world in the daughter's body to live and thrive throughout her life. Scientists say that up to six percent of a mother's blood is made up of her child's cells beyond pregnancy (Shute, 2010). Some of the cells in the mother's blood and organs are from her mother, which also can get passed on to her daughter. So, according to scientific evidence, we have at the very least our mother's cells living within us, and potentially, the cells of our grandmothers, too (Shute, 2010). Biologically, we think back through our mothers, whether we are women or men. Women who give birth to children have, in a sense, the added ability to think *forward* through their

children. Mothers are able to think, as Madeline Grumet gently articulates, “this child is mine. This child is me” (Grumet, 2013, p. 92). We have yet to discover what this cellular transfer means for women who give birth, but preliminary research shows that there is some level of correlation between the microchimerism mother’s gain during pregnancy and improved health outcomes for the mother in things like rheumatoid arthritis, but may also cause certain autoimmune disorders like systemic sclerosis.

We are all microchimera. We all engage in this psychic and bodily dialogue with another. But women, and particularly the women who carry children in their bodies often experience a heightened awareness that their bodies are not only their own. It is what Grumet (1988) called “body knowledge” (p.3). Those of us who have not given birth – women who are not biological mothers and men alike – do not remember giving our cells to another, we do not remember embracing the cells of another. Unless, of course, the microchimerism occurs another way. The results of a study on the presence of male microchimerism in females who did not give birth to sons suggested one avenue for further study, in a long list of potential reasons why a woman may have male cells in her body is as a result of unprotected sex. The results of the study were:

Overall, we found that slightly more than one fifth of all women with no history of a male birth had male microchimerism in their peripheral blood. Among women who only had daughters or were nulligravid, one potential explanation for male microchimerism could be a nonrecognized (male) miscarriage. Fetal traffic into maternal blood has been reported as early as 4 to 5 weeks postconception, and recent studies suggest the incidence of early pregnancy loss is much higher than previously thought. A second potential source is from a “vanished (male) twin.” A vanished twin is thought to be a relatively common phenomena resulting from spontaneous resorption of one sac or embryo in a twin pregnancy. Twin loss occurs most often in the first trimester and is usually completely reabsorbed into the placenta without being noticed at birth. A third possibility is from an

older male sibling transferred by the maternal circulation to the fetus of a later pregnancy. Another possibility that has not been investigated is whether male DNA can be detected in a woman's circulation from sexual intercourse without pregnancy (Yan, Lambert, Guthrie, Porter, Loubiere, Madeleine, Stevens, Hermes, & Nelson, 2005, p. 905).

Unprotected sex as a source of microchimerism was the fourth, and clearly *not investigated* potential conclusion from this study. Despite this, what emerged following this research was a series of scientifically dubious articles that cited this paper, with headlines like *Women may carry the DNA of all their sexual partners* and *This study will make you think twice about who you are getting into bed with* and *Don't have sex with anyone who you wouldn't want to be*. These are not scientific articles. They are not even academically sound pieces of writing. And yet, they speak volumes about how women's sexuality is policed and warned against even at the slightest provocation.

This is not the Curriculum-as-Plan, but it is the Curriculum-as-Implied that women, and men, receive in subtle cues throughout our lives. It is so subtle that many of us never become aware of the experiences that press heavily against us. What is a bit more heaviness when we are already unable to stand from the weight of existence?

## **5.2 Daddy Lessons**

I am metaphorically chimera. My feminism is also chimera. It is not one thing, it is many things that sometimes fit well together, and other times do not. It is a form of intersectionality, recognizing that though our bodies may look one way, there are parts of us that experience the world differently. Intersectionality is a feminism that embraces the chimera, it embraces the complexity of a person to go beyond gender and into the world of

race, language, sexuality, and politics. First introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) to address black women's experiences, intersectionality offered an interdisciplinary study of "feminist and antiracist theory and politics" (Carbado, Crenshaw, Mays, and Tomlinson, 2013, p. 303). It is a way of recognizing that we each experience our female-ness differently, based on other qualities of our chimera, including race, ability, religion, amongst other qualities.

My ethnicity is something I have grappled with for some time. Race and religion are entangled for me, with my gender. My sister, who looks so similar to me that people who have known us our whole lives still confuse us, has experienced the world very differently from me. My sister, whose cells may have rested in our mother's womb for years before finding their way into me, does not necessarily identify herself as a woman of colour. "We are, and we aren't" she says. There is wisdom to this.

My racial identity is an unanswered question for many people. I don't think it requires an answer from anyone but me, and I identify internally as a woman of colour, and on most forms that ask my race, I always look for the "other" box. I think back through my mother, a beautiful brown woman. My world was constructed that way. Our history was the history of brown bodies, my community was brown, but I recognize there is a tension for *me* to claim solely brownness.

My elementary school was not brown, and this is where much of my early racial identity was formed, from Kindergarten to the fourth grade. It was an all-girls nightmare that consisted of girls who were white, with straight hair, and East Asian, with straight hair. They were mostly petite. I didn't begrudge them that, but I learned early on that my warm skin tone and 'big bones' (the strange comfort someone once gave me when I expressed concern



over my size) was both noticed by the other girls, and not welcomed. Led by a young Machiavellian five-year-old who had mastered the British colonial maxim “divide and conquer,” my classmates picked on one another for the most ridiculous things. I was made fun of for my looks as well as for the food I’d bring from home. Delicious and fragrant meals that my mother lovingly prepared, making a bit extra for me to take for lunch. My food was better than any of the disgusting sandwiches my classmates brought, but they made fun of me for it, and I asked my mother to start making disgusting sandwiches for me, too. They were so disgusting I used to take one bite of them and then throw the rest on a shelf above the cubbies, worried that my teacher would notice me throwing my lunch away.

In this class, there was a hierarchy of ridicule and I, somehow, landed at the bottom of the food chain. It may not have been a conscious decision to be a woman of colour, it may have been a reality that was foisted on me in a delicate developmental time, but whatever it was, I experienced rejection from my classmates for my skin colour and the food I ate, as ridiculous as it now sounds today.

Each new school I attended was a way of redefining myself. When I left the all-girls nightmare mini-British Raj, I found myself at a smaller private school in North Vancouver, with many brown boys and brown girls. In this school, colour mattered, but not in a way that segregated us. We mattered *because* of who we were and where we came from, not despite it. We even had a brown teacher, a kind, young, very ‘cool’ man of Sri Lankan origin. My friends and I were all smitten. It was in this school that I began to relax into my identity. Sure, I was a girl of colour, but who really cared? I was popular. After years of being made insecure about my own appearance, I made fun of a classmate for being overweight. I’m sure he was devastated, though in the moment he laughed it off. I can still remember the look on

his face after the joke ended. I could see it lingered for him. A few years later I ran into him, and I now vaguely remember apologizing, but that kind of an apology is too little, too late. I'll always feel badly for the way I behaved.

Driving to this school became too arduous for my mother, and so I moved to a public school, where I recall our social studies class was particularly lacking. I remember the textbook we used had three short paragraphs on Islam. At least I was marginally represented, though I recall it said something about *hijab* that confused my classmates because I don't wear one. I did well in this school, participating in science fairs and debate tournaments. I took theater and loved it. I did too well at this school for my parent's liking. They didn't think I was being challenged enough, and perhaps that was true. In the Spring of 2001, I went for two full days of testing in order to seek admittance to the Transition Program, a school where students complete the curricular requirements of grades eight through ten in the first year, and grades 11 and 12 in the second year. I could have started university studies at 16 years old. This is a horrifying thought, knowing now what I do about university life.

I was admitted to this program, and it was there that my teacher, in 2001, singled me out, as the only Muslim girl in the school. It was here that I learned that my brown history, my brown community, was something to hide and protect from the world.

I am a woman of colour. I say this because in my own identity I have seen myself as a woman of colour. When I left the Transition Program, I learned first-hand about what it meant to be "passing." Passing is an abbreviated form of "racial passing" a concept born in the United States during the colonial period (Dawkins, 2012). It is a form of deception "that enables a person to adopt certain roles or identities from which he would be barred by prevailing social standards in the absence of his misleading conduct" (Kennedy, 2001, p.

1145). Passing was about looking white and was the purview, for the most part of people like me: multiracial. Their features were fluid enough to not identify them into an easy category, which put them in a complicated situation of being at times accepted by a variety of communities and rejected by those same communities. Like in the case of a light skinned African American man who was struck by car driven by a white doctor in Atlanta in 1931, a time of continued segregation of races in the city. He was rushed to a hospital, and based on his skin colour was admitted to the white ward of the segregated hospital. It wasn't until his son-in-law, an obviously black man, visited that the hospital realized its 'error' and transferred the patient to the "coloured ward" where he eventually died (Kennedy, 2001).

To pass, I straightened my hair as I had for most of my life, bought lunch at school to avoid both disgusting homemade sandwiches and delicious homemade curries and the "outing" that kind of a lunch would foist on me. I tried to pass, though I'd never deny my heritage if anyone asked. I just tried to look the part. I thought I was successful until my classmate tried to burn me with a Bible. Then, I knew there was no hiding. The stakes were nowhere near as high for me as they were for African Americans in the South of the United States in the 1930s or even today in many parts of North America. My life was not in danger, just my dignity and, perhaps, the idea of an easier life. There is nothing easy about trying to pass, though. There is a terror of being caught out, and passing is a self-negating experience. I wasn't trying to hide entirely, but I wanted life to be a bit easier. I didn't want to have to answer questions about my identity, and I didn't want to answer for the other brown people of the world, some of whom were committing highly publicized acts of violence. But trying to pass was a violence toward myself, as well. And it was one I was committing against myself.

At my final high school, a picturesque United World College (UWC) on Vancouver Island, I was surrounded by two hundred students from over 90 different countries. As with all UWCs, at Pearson College, a quarter of the student population was from the country where the UWC was located. I was part of the 25% from Canada. During my time there, the term “Canadian Girls” came to refer to a group of Canadian students who seemed to take different kinds of leadership roles in the school community. In some ways, what they did was praiseworthy, they were trying to make our school community better environmentally and socially. But they were also despised in some ways. It was an insult to be a Canadian Girl. I understood at that time that this hatred was linked to their sense of authority over the student body. I was never considered a Canadian Girl. I didn’t understand at first why this would be the case. I defended the title Canadian Girl because if I, born and raised in Canada, was not a Canadian Girl, then who was? A classmate who was not from Canada explained to me that I was unlike the other Canadian girls because I was not “blonde like them” which I understood as less about my hair colour and more about my skin tone because some of the Real Canadian Girls were brunettes as well. I think even more than my skin tone it had more to do with my worldview. My worldview is not European. If my worldview was a colour, it would be brown.

But my skin is like a truly ineffective chameleon where instead of blending in, I, more often than not, stand out. In a classroom full of white girls, peppered with a few Chinese girls, I was clearly, emphatically, most definitely *NOT* white. But, when I went to *Jamatkhana*, the house of worship for Ismailis, and on the rare occasion (this was an environment where I was quite shy) that I actually spoke to other kids my age, there was always also a sense that I was different, even in my brown community. I have never *felt*

white, but at times the other kids at *Jamatkhana* would ask me why I was there. In their minds, I was white, and white people weren't Ismaili. "But," I said, pointing to a picture of the spiritual leader of the Ismaili community, the Aga Khan, "*he's* not brown."

I recognized from a young age that my skin colour didn't fully reflect how I felt inside. I would often hold my arm up next to my mother's arm to compare our tones, insisting my skin was darker than hers. She would laugh and say, "oh yes, I see it" though we both knew this was impossible, no matter how much time I lay in the sun wanting to be as easily understood outside as I felt inside.

I experienced this backward chameleon reality once again when I arrived at Brown University to start my undergraduate degree and made my first friend who was not my roommate. Her name was Nadia and she is and was a beautiful brown woman from East Africa with a deeply vulnerable heart and a smile that seems to endlessly wrap around her face. When she smiles, she does it with her whole body. We met, and she decided we were going to be friends. I was thrilled. It was day two of my university career and I had made a friend. Nadia is good at making friends in a way that I am not. She seems to have a complete lack of inhibitions and will immediately become lifelong friends with anyone she sees wearing a Manchester United jersey. I was not one of these people. After a few days, Nadia and I were eating lunch and she decided we should go back to her room to meet her friends. We burst into her room and Nadia said to her roommate, Sophia, "this is Samira, she's Muslim!" I didn't know Nadia well, but I found this incredibly odd, and at least a little bit frustrating. She was outing me and I didn't really want to be outed so early on. I was going to be at Brown for four years, I didn't want it to be a more difficult four years than it had to be. I still had visions of passing. Then, moments later, another girl from across the hall entered.

Nadia perked up again, “Aida, this is Samira, Samira, Aida. Samira is Muslim!” *What the hell, Nadia?* I thought to myself. *Can’t you just be cool for a minute?* In that room, the four of us sat: beautiful brown Nadia, beautiful black Aida, beautiful Sophia (who looked Hispanic to me), and myself, a confused outed complex and frustrated me. I loved Sophia and Aida. They were funny and sweet. Despite Nadia’s strange religious confessions at our introductions, they didn’t seem to mind my religion and I left with Nadia, having gained two new friends. On the walk back, the question bubbled up, “Nadia, what’s the deal with telling everyone my religion?” She looked confused and confessed that it may not have been obvious to them that I was Muslim. I was confused. Why did it need to be obvious to them? I just thought they’d like to know that you’re also Muslim. Also? Yeah, they’re both Muslim, too.

Oh.

As it turned out, Sophia was of Pakistani origin. I guess we’re not all what we seem. Sometimes, I am a woman of colour who seems white to other people. I think this experience, of seeming white to others, will always require a distinguishable moment in which I realize that the person I am interacting with thinks that I am white. It always takes me aback, in the few experiences that I have had with it. More often than not, I am Portuguese or Brazilian, a country full of people who paid little heed to skin colour and made babies that look like me, I suppose.

I have never identified ethnically with my father. Though I have identified ethnically with my mother, I recognize that I am also not exactly that, either. For a time in my first elementary school, I was always thrilled when my father would pick me up, not realizing that part of my excitement was to see my dad at school, and part of it was that my dad looked like

the top of the ethnic food chain hierarchy. He looked like the best kind of parents. This was something my mother confessed had been a fear of hers entering into a relationship with a white man: would her children be ashamed of her? I don't think I was ever ashamed of my mother, but I was, for a time, perhaps prouder of being seen with my father at school. And maybe this felt like shame to my mother. I grieve this now. When I say that I am a woman of colour, I do not say it as though I have the same experiences as those who, at times with glee, suggest I am not a woman of colour because I do not have as much colour as they do. These comments become a pawn in the Game of Privilege (Gay, 2014) rather than an exploration of different forms of grief and trying to come to a place of deeper understanding.

My father is white on the surface. But in my family, we have a running joke that he is more of a Brown Aunty than the rest. Like a Brown Aunty, he will force guests to sit and eat more than they want to. I wondered why I never identified ethnically with my father. Was it because my mother was the primary cultural transmitter in our family? Was it because he himself had chosen to adopt both Islam and the language (my father speaks better Gujarati than I do, and it was technically my mother tongue. He also cooks better vegetable curry than I do.) and culture of my mother's heritage? Or was it because of the way others see me, what researchers call "reflected appraisals in racial identity" (Khanna, 2004, p. 117)? As Khanna concludes from her study of people like me, people who are Asian and White, "physical characteristics often dictate acceptance into ethnic/racial groups. For those who attempt to assert an identity that differs from their physical appearance, reactions by others constrain their choices and influence their identity formation" (Khanna, 2004, p. 125). If my identity were to rest on the ways other people see me, I would remain in a permanent state of

abeyance and subjugation, waiting for others to decide what I look like, and how I may be permitted to define myself.

Nobody formally taught me that racism exists. Nobody formally taught me that being a woman of colour comes with its own challenges. Nobody formally taught me that being a woman of a white father is different than being a woman of just one colour. I learned these things in school, in my community, and in my interactions with others. These realities played themselves out in every social situation I experienced. I consider myself a woman of colour, and most people I interact with seem to feel the same way. I know this because whenever I played “Spice Girls” as a kid, I was more often than not made to play Scary Spice. I was, inherently, the girl of colour, and the Spice Girl of colour. I have also come to realize that people who do not know my family do not see me as a mix of races, but instead as a single race, whether that is brown or white, or something else entirely. Our racial assumptions of people have not evolved to thinking in terms of *and*. I recognize that my mix of the construct of race gives me a little bit more space to exist. In predominantly white settings, I do stand out, but not enough to feel uncomfortable, and mostly, on the surface, I am not brown *enough* to warrant distrust. And I am fortunate that my brown community is still *my* community and I am also *not* white enough to warrant distrust. I used to think this was an opportunity, that I was uniquely positioned as a bridge between races. But I have come to realize that while I may offer a path, we are each our own chimera. We each hold our own pasts and histories, we each think back through different mothers, and those histories are not just ethnic and they are not just gendered. They are both. They are, as Aoki says, “both this and that, and more” (Aoki, 1993, p. 295). My life, my truth, is more than just one characteristic of my being.



### 5.3 Sandcastles

My niece was born three months after my mother was killed. She would have been a precious miracle for me regardless of the timing of her birth, but from the day of her arrival, she carried both the weight of my sadness and the lightness of my joy in equal measure. That is a lot for an infant to bear. I am a woman who was the youngest child in my family, who has not had children, and does not necessarily expect to do so. As a result, my niece is the closest thing I have to both a younger sister and first child. What I want for her is a life full of opportunities, a community to lighten whatever grief she feels, openness to the world, and an existence that isn't always comfortable, but that is secure. I want for her to be able to walk down the street without having to deal with men making comments about her "tits," that she should "smile more," or that he'd like to see her "dead with [his] cum on [her] face." These are things I have been told on the street, in the middle of the day, in just the last few months. There is grief in being unable to walk from home without noise cancelling headphones to keep out the catcalls of the street. I hope for a generational shift such that she may, as a woman, listen to the sounds of her city without hearing the sounds of harassment.

For her second birthday, I tried to give her a gift that would represent these hopes and dreams for her. I ended up settling on large building blocks. The kinds that, teamed up with a child's imagination, can become whatever she wanted. I felt, in giving her these blocks, that I was giving her the world of her own imagining.

As I was selecting the blocks, I was presented with two options: a unisex option that was made up of green, red, yellow, and blue blocks and a girl's option that was made up of three different shades of pink.

I fumed at the webpage before me. She's two years old and all research points to a variety of colours being stimulating and important for child development. What kind of trauma would a child need to suffer to refuse to play with blocks that were any other colour than pink? Why is there a market for this? Who thought this was the idea they needed to actualize in the world? Why aren't there all-blue boy toys? Why are we only limiting girls from such a young age? But perhaps most importantly, why limit anyone at all?

While colour cues are not necessarily harmful in and of themselves, it has been found that it is generally the first form of gender stereotyping people experience in their lives (Cunningham and Macrae, 2011). It starts as early as the age of two years old (LoBue and DeLoache, 2011). My niece, at two years old, was already no longer just a baby human, but was niche as a baby *girl* human. And niche in the way that makes her exist in relation to the already dominant baby boy humans, her blocks were special against the "mainstream" genderless toys. Forming the ability for gender stereotyping at such a young age enables it to become a habit, something that comes almost instinctively, without thought. Colour casting is not the only way that children learn to gender stereotype, and so it remains likely that if children didn't learn bias through this means, they would certainly learn it later in life in some other way (Cunningham and Macrae, 2011). While gender stereotyping based on colour has many adverse effects in establishing the ability to consider certain activities and products a female domain or male domain, one study has shown that it can also have an adverse effect on health outcomes throughout life. Toys that are pink and targeted at girls generally fall into the category of sedentary play, while toys that are different colours and labeled either neutral or for boys tend to active play toys (Mullins, 2015). This means that from an early start in life, women are set up to be predisposed to activities that are sedentary,

and, for the most part, reflective of traditional roles like caretaking, while men are set up for an active lifestyle that predispose them for less home-based roles (Mullins, 2015).

For my niece, I hope that learning this stereotyping later in life is probably better than at the age of two years old. Things that come to us later in life can be questioned, particularly if a child meets bias once she has learned how to ask the question “why?”

#### **5.4 6-Inch**

Women characters weren't very present in my education. The grief of womanhood lies in the erasure not only of female figures, but also of feminist thinking in our upbringing and education. In my elementary and high school experience, women were ghosts to a masculine curriculum. The curriculum did not need to learn to related to me, the living, breathing girl in the classroom, because it was preparing me for a man's world. When curricular opportunities did arise, the women that I learned to revere were not women who experienced the world in a way that related to the way that I did. The stories I read didn't offer space for women of colour. This is well documented, indeed, “for more than 75 years, librarians, scholars, critics, and creators of children's books have documented, described, and problematized the ongoing lack of diversity in children's literature” (Crisp, Knezek, Quinn, Bingham, Girardeau, and Starks, 2016, p. 29). I was thrilled to read that Hermione Granger in Harry Potter was not only academically inclined but also had to struggle with my daily battle with curly, frizzy hair despite her magical abilities. One of my other favourite books as a child was Phillip Pullman's *Golden Compass*. The lead character in this book was Lyra Belacqua, a girl of 11 years old, about my age when I read the books. The description of her, with her dirty blonde hair and pale blue eyes was gripping. Not because the description was

particularly well done (my sense is that Pullman could've said, "imagine your version of the girl you wish you were" and most girls my age would have conjured something closely resembling Lyra) but because she was *exactly* what I wished I could be: small, blonde, pale blue eyes (everyone has pale blue eyes, don't they?) and tomboyish attitude. She was the epitome of everything I wanted: to be able to hold the tomboyishness with the continuing notion of femininity and beauty. I wanted to embody that perfect combination of pale blue eyes and blonde hair.

I remember sitting on a swivel chair in the basement of my house in a room with a large mirror. As I read the description, I looked up at the mirror and saw myself. The question was not formed perfectly in my mind at that time, but what I wanted to know was: could I be both strong and feminine? At that time, notions of beauty were unchallenged, and the response I felt in my heart was: no. So, I swiveled and wished with all of my heart that when I turned around again, I'd be petite, blonde, and have blue eyes. I realized this might be jarring for my family, so I also wished that my family would find this sudden transformation normal. I wished, and I prayed, and I swiveled around, hoping the magic would happen. It will probably not surprise you that it did not transform, but I was a firm believer in both a Santa Claus God and magic that I was sure I would.

Books for children introduce and reinforce certain norms of our society and culture. With most books written by white authors, depicting white children, we are introduced to a world of whiteness from a young age. For me it was a world that was just out of reach, but one that I longed to be part of in many ways. My parents were extremely conscious of the books we read. I remember my mother giving me a book of Indian mythology, perhaps to balance out my young years of obsessively reading books on Greek and Roman mythology.

It wasn't that the Greeks and Romans were not worthy, she just wanted to make sure I had books that connected me to my past as well, a past she knew would be erased as I grew up and studied in North America. Even still, it was hard to find books that had great female characters as their lead, and whenever they did, the girls were unfailingly white. The *Golden Compass*, Harry Potter, even the Alannah Series was centered on a female knight with purple eyes. We could imagine a woman with purple eyes, but we couldn't imagine a woman being beautiful, feminine *and* non-white.

I believe, strongly, that my sister and I have very different experiences of race and beauty because of our relationships to our hair. My hair chooses to come out of my head all twisted. When I was a young child, this was endearing and even cute. But, as I grew older, curly was considered messy and unprofessional. Unkempt. So, while my sister could step out of the shower and her hair would cascade in lovely just barely wavy strands around her face, my hair required me to sit, for what felt like an eternity every other day, and dry my hair. This process began, I think, at age four years old, or so. It was a frustrating experience. I used to cry often when I had to sit under the hot hairdryer and hear nothing but the whirring of its fans, and feel nothing but an incessant pulling of my hair, my scalp burning under its heat. My mother probably hated doing this, too. I never really got to talk to her about it, but I think she did. And I don't need to ask her why she did it. I know why. She was protecting me and making me beautiful, as close to the standards of beauty we were seeing around us all the time. My brother, who has the same curly hair as me, didn't struggle in the same way with his hair. At the very least, in having short hair, a hair drying experiment would take less than five minutes for him. I wanted my hair long, because it was feminine. And eventually, I *wanted* it straight because I understood that was beautiful. And tidy.

The next phase of my hair journey is both fortuitous and ridiculous. In 2013, I fell in love with a man who, despite doing his degrees in Computer Science and Sustainable Development, had found himself starting an Argan oil based cosmetics company that focused on shampoo and conditioner. When we first started dating, he had no idea my hair was naturally curly. Being in the business of shampoo and conditioner makes a person talk about hair more than most, and it came out quickly that I was hiding behind hairdryers and flat irons. Try, he urged. But, it isn't beautiful, I argued. I love it, he assured. I tried it. He was the second person to tell me that he loved my curly hair (my sister was the first and only throughout my childhood). He supported me, and I felt, in using his shampoo and conditioner and celebrating my curls, I could also support him. I needed this level of self-convincing to walk out of the house with my embattled curly hair. It was such a defining moment for me that I wrote a love poem to this man about my hair and my love for him.

### **Curly**

The last time  
I wore my hair  
the way God intended it

I was three years old  
No. I was three years old with an attitude that nobody could shake.  
Rambunctious. Curious. Wild.

But with every hairbrush forced through those curls  
I was shaken.  
A flat iron charging down, a tank in Tienanmen Square.  
The curls stood down. Tamed.

My dear,  
You have stripped my hair of conditioning  
My dear  
You have taken every inch of stay-in-place  
and wrapped it around your finger,  
breathed life into its twirl.

My love  
You have taken this woman  
And let her be that girl.

I remain unsure if this man, the man I have now married, realizes what an incredible feat it was to come to accept my hair, when so much within my home, my literature, and my popular culture was telling me that my hair, as it was intended, was not beautiful. Today, there is a natural hair movement, spurred by black culture that celebrates hair like mine, and I am grateful for it, because without it, my life would likely still be spent more often than not in front of a mirror, trying to contort my hair into an unnatural shape. I love my hair, even when it disobeys me. I remain a ghost to the consumerist standards of beauty, and apparently we curly haired ladies are not much of a market for cosmetic companies, but I don't want my beauty to be measured in economic terms. I feel for those women whose beauty is turned into a commodity. It shouldn't have taken a man to propel me towards loving my beauty. It was a fortuitous moment in my life where I discovered both feminist ideas and my future husband that built the foundation for self-love. It is not up to companies to necessarily change their practices to create a world where beauty standards are nonexistent. It would be an incredible feat for a beauty company to imagine a world where people were celebrating their features as they are, rather than constantly struggling to attain some shapeshifting ideal. That said, perhaps it is up to literature and film, art forms that should be subject to creativity rather than consumerism (though I recognize this is not always the case) to create a body of work that represents and explores the many worlds of life that exist, not just those fictional or real, of white, male protagonists. And to create those worlds for a universal audience, such that as much as I admire Lyra Belacqua and Harry Potter, a young boy may admire a story about Samira, the racially complicated woman.

## 5.5 All Night

i will crawl for white beauty.  
eat my arms.  
barter my legs (make my thighs into  
altars of  
grief).  
for  
skin that does not drink night.  
hair that is not angry.  
body that is not soil.  
i place curses on my flesh  
call them diets.  
tell my ancestors  
they are ugly.  
howl at my nose until it bleeds.  
run my heart across my teeth, repeat-  
edly.  
i am dying.  
to be  
beautiful.  
but  
beautiful.  
is  
something.  
i  
will never  
be.

– by the time we are seven  
(Waheed, 2013, p. 28).

## 5.6 Love Drought

“Which backstreet boy do you have a crush on?” The question was posed to me like it was obvious that I would have a crush on at least one of them, *surely*. Weren’t they just the dreamiest? And yet... I didn’t. I mean, I said Bryan because my friends were all staring at me expectantly waiting to hear which one I chose, but I just wasn’t into any of them. My



love for the Backstreet Boys was purely on musical talent (or what I, as an eight-year-old perceived as musical talent). Since that time, it has been equally challenging to find examples of beautiful men of colour celebrated in popular culture. It isn't impossible, but it does prove difficult, particularly in roles that are romantically driven. That is, men of colour are often overlooked for roles that portray romantic masculinity. As observed by Imran Siddiquee (2017) in a recent opinion piece there are two major factors at play: the first is that the cultural standard for romantic masculinity is based on whiteness, the second is that roles that do not explicitly engage race invariably go to white men (and women), and people of colour are left with roles that deal directly with their race (Siddiquee, 2017). People of colour are relegated to roles that are explicit about race: a black man will more often than not have to take a role that is specified and relates to his blackness, while an Indian man will take a role whose story is entwined with his Indianness. These roles are limiting in their scope – when race is central to the plot, there is little room for the hero to play a universal romantic masculine character.

And little girls like me are left without beautiful brown and black men to choose from when classmates ask, “which one do you like?” That said, things have changed a bit: the most recent boyband craze was One Direction, a British-Irish pop group of originally five young men, one of whom was Zayn Malik, British born of Pakistani and Irish descent. In my circle of friends, Zayn was, and remains, adored and held on a pedestal for representing both a romantic crooner and a man of colour. His appeal goes beyond women of colour. He eventually found it more beneficial perhaps both creatively as well as financially to quit the band and begin his solo career in the same way that Justin Timberlake did from boyband \*NSYNC and Beyoncé did from Destiny's Child. He is a star in his own right.

But Zayn Malik is not an actor, and his role as romantic masculine protagonist is one he crafted as a musician. As I continue to consume popular culture, I recognize that, more often than not, my version of attractive is not represented well in the stories movie makers tell. My husband is a beautiful brown man, and that is what I am attracted to. Where is he represented in the media that we widely consume? In Riz Ahmed, star of the show *The Night Of*, a story of a young Muslim man who may or may not have killed a woman? In Dev Patel, star of *Slumdog Millionaire*, and more recently *Lion*, both stories that relate to him having been born in either the slums of India or a village in India? In Kal Penn of the *Harold and Kumar* series and *House*, one role portraying a pothead in search of a burger, and in the other a doctor and team member to the protagonist? Or in Kunal Nayyar in *Big Bang Theory*, who is a socially awkward man, generally unsuccessful in romantic relationships? While there are some exceptions to the rule of brown men requiring specifically brown stories (for example, Kal Penn's role in *House* was not solely ethnically driven), Sidiquee (2017) makes the argument that brown men have not been able to balance romanticism and masculinity in Hollywood, and this is a problem that weighs heavily on me and our society, whether we acknowledge it or not. It is a problem not only for men of colour, but also for the versions of masculinity we find, the versions of romantic love we witness, and the ways in which both men and women imagine romantic love with men of colour.

## **5.7 Forward**

Our visions of masculinity to date have not done us many favours. Masculinity has been defined in many ways, broadly as being centered on the accumulation of power and dominance in whatever structure is available, including business or within the scope of

marriage (Zurbriggen, 2010). These acts of dominance are particularly targeted against that which is seen as feminine, including women and homosexual men (Zurbriggen, 2010). In particular, our society's traditional masculinities are set up to not only avoid feminine associations, but by rejecting traits that are often seen as feminine, men are prevented both from valuing women (and indeed, are encouraged in this scenario to devalue women) as well as from allowing oneself to express and experience a full range and depth of human emotions (Zurbriggen, 2010). Zurbriggen (2010) argues that these traits, along with several other traditionally masculine traits, are responsible for both war and rape culture. The argument is that masculine socialization into these beliefs are both "implicated in both rape and war" (Zurbriggen, 2010, p. 544).

There is another thread of masculinity. Sexism abounds in our culture, but is so ubiquitous that we are often oblivious to its presence unless pushed to notice these instances in daily life. Sexist beliefs have been broken down into Modern Sexism, Neosexism and Benevolent Sexism (Becker and Swim, 2011). Modern Sexism and Neosexism deal with three primary questions as outlined by Julia Becker and Janet Swim (2011), "(a) beliefs in the rarity of discrimination against women (b) antagonism toward women's demands, and (c) resentment of efforts to address gender inequality" (p. 227). Benevolent Sexist Beliefs are more subtle forms of masculinities described above. These include, for example, believing that women should be idealized as caregivers. It is a subtle means of creating a power imbalance that creates an atmosphere of permissibility for condescension of the man towards the woman, "because women are perceived as weak and incompetent" (Becker and Swim, 2011, p. 228). The study concluded that it was not enough to increase the attention to sexist information for men to recognize sexist incidents and reduce sexist beliefs, but the

researchers suggested that they “expected this outcome because of men’s higher status in society and their corresponding greater interest in maintaining this status” (Becker and Swim, 2011, p. 239).

There is a curriculum of masculinity just as there is a curriculum of femininity, and both weigh heavily on men and women, whatever their sexuality. I have found myself, a newly married woman, in what looks like a truly traditional marriage. My husband has found himself in a truly traditional marriage, also. But we are not traditional individuals, we are (bad) feminists who struggle against the curriculum we have been taught from the first day of our lives. Bad Feminism is a term coined by Roxane Gay, who describes it in her book through her own personal experience as a Bad Feminist:

I embrace the label of bad feminist because I am human. I am messy. I’m not trying to be an example. I am not trying to be perfect. I am not trying to say I have all the answers. I am not trying to say I’m right. I am just trying – trying to support what I believe in, trying to do some good in this world, trying to make some noise with my writing while also being myself: a woman who loves pink and likes to get freaky and sometimes dances her ass off to music she knows, she *knows*, is terrible for women and who sometimes plays dumb with repairmen because it’s just easier to let them feel macho than it is to stand on the moral high ground (Gay, 2014, xi).

This is a forgiving form of feminism and one which offers me, and my husband, space to be ourselves, complicated by the things which we grew up with, me with my versions of femininity and he with his versions of masculinity, while simultaneously trying to unlearn these habits. It is uncomfortable. Maybe I don’t like pink, and maybe my life is too sedentary. Is it feminist that we are married and I am still a student, so he is the one providing for us? How do we maintain our commitment to feminism in the face of these roles

that so easily slip into tradition? I am a work in progress, a Bad Feminist who is trying to unlearn and relearn, now in the context of a loving relationship.

## 5.8 Hold Up

Taking up Gay's notion of Bad Feminism, I can also claim that I am a Bad Muslim. I try to be good, but I also don't really trust traditional versions of what it means to be good in Islam anymore. I first encountered my Bad Muslimness when I was quite young – I was around ten years old and it was the second time I was given the opportunity to lead the main prayer in my *Jamatkhana*. It is a prayer I recited with some regularity (I'll admit there probably hasn't been even a week in my life when I have recited all the prayers both morning and evening that are asked of us as Ismailis), but I said the prayer often enough that it is likely engrained in me until death, even if I don't recite it again for the rest of my life. It is a prayer in Arabic. I have learned the meaning, though I don't speak Arabic and have only memorized the prayer based on how it sounds. It is a strange thing to recite something (almost) daily and have only a sense of what I am saying. I think this is part of the reason why the Beloved always felt unreachable. We didn't even speak the same language, and I was sure, with my English formed tongue, I was not pronouncing any of the Arabic words correctly enough to be understood.

That night, I nervously crept up to the microphone. I had been prepped that this was a big deal, everyone's prayers were in my hands, so to speak. I was told this so that I would understand how special it was, but this translated into my mind as: *don't screw this up*. I started reciting the prayer, and then I found myself in a loop. I looped once. Someone mumbled something, but I didn't realize yet that I was looping. And then I looped again.

Then, everybody was saying things. All at the same time. I had no clue where I was in the prayer, no clue where I should be. To me, this felt interminable. I had jolted everyone, even the great-grandmother in the back who usually slept through the ceremonies, out of their reverie and into this world with my loopy prayer. That night, I decided I never wanted to recite the prayer again. I'd do the English parts of the ceremony, but never again Arabic. I had no control in this foreign language, and it wasn't enough to memorize the sounds the way I had. It wasn't the last time I did it, but still, to this day, I have few reservations of public speaking, but public praying? My head aches with the stress of it. It is a Good Muslim behaviour in which I'll probably never find comfort.

One of the fundamentals of my faith, my community's Islam, is intellectual exploration. Education is prized above almost all else. And I was taught from day one that to question everything was acceptable, even to have questions in the context of faith, was acceptable. And so, I questioned. And it seemed like after the first few questions, I started to annoy people who were trying to answer my questions. "Samira, sometimes matters of faith require *faith*, you have to just take that leap" one beloved community elder told me. I wanted to, and so I brushed the questions aside, they didn't really impact my practice of the faith anyways. Then the final straw came when I read Chaudhry's *Domestic Violence and the Islamic Tradition* (Chaudhry, 2013). In her work, she cites a passage in the Qur'an in which men are ostensibly granted permission to hit their wives. I'll admit to two things, the first is that I have never read the Qur'an in its entirety in English translation (Bad Muslim) and the second is that I used to gloss over parts of the Qur'an that seemed boring (Really Bad Muslim). Basically, I was taking from the religion what I wanted: a pretty fantastic community and a spiritual grounding. But I was also a bit of a fundamentalist in my beliefs: I

believed that in order to be Muslim, we had to accept the entirety of the faith. To me, this included the very clearly laid out passage in which men were granted the permission to hit their wives. Of course, before reading this book, I knew that there were passages in the Qur'an that espoused violence, but there were passages that also espoused peace, and generally the violent passages were qualified with things like "forgiveness is better." So, I was comfortable that for the time perhaps a pacifist religion was impractical, but by including the caveat that forgiveness was better, I felt that this book was truly for all time, for all people, as my faith guided me.

But this passage tore me up inside. And it still grieves me.

The passage reads:

Men are *qawwāmūn* (in authority) over women, because God as has preferred some over others and because they spend of their wealth. Righteous women are obedient and guard in [their husbands'] absence what God would have them guard. Concerning those women from whom you fear *nushūz* (disobedience/rebellion), admonish them, and/or abandon them in bed, and/or *wa-d ribūhunna* (hit them). If they obey you, do not seek a means against them. God is most High, Great. (Qur'an, 4:34) (Chaudhry, 2013).

This passage has literally broken my heart in a way that I have found difficult to describe. As Chaudhry (2013) explores in her research, looking back to tradition, there was not a single, *not a single*, thinker in so-called traditional Islam that argued against a man's authority over his wife. Unsurprisingly, all of the thinkers in Islamic tradition that we still have access to through their surviving texts were men, and often, husbands. Chaudhry (in press) offers that what is needed is no longer an approach to Islamic studies that relies on the traditional sources, but allows the living, breathing voices of women to engage the texts. In this work, in particular, she engages a survey that seeks to determine whether Muslims recognize this

verse as Qur'anic, and whether they themselves hold the view that wives can be hit by their husbands. The results of her survey are both heartening and disheartening. In different religious centers, there were varying levels of recognition of this as part of the Qur'anic text, with many people indicating that this was not part of their religious text. The disheartening part is that it remains part of the Qur'anic text, and therefore, a legitimizing force for those who seek a reason for their abuse.

I have uncomplicated feelings about this passage. It is unacceptable and I reject it as it stands. It has pushed me to re-examine those parts of my faith that raised questions before, and it has raised new questions again now. Questions, that I had once been taught was *part* of my faith, but also recognize that they are questions that are upsetting and annoying to many of my loved ones. That said, I am still a Muslim, and will gladly accept the title of Bad Muslim, because I recognize that I am now very loosely tied to Islam in many ways. Many of the loose ties I have to faith have to do with my recognition that organized religions, be it Islam or any other religion, has deeply patriarchal roots that are so engrained into the fabric of the religion that it is sometimes impossible to recognize. And I do not want to find myself further subjected to patriarchy if I can help it. But, Islam remains the language of my faith, it is my mother tongue of spirituality. I love to engage with other languages of spirituality as they enhance my understanding of the world, and particularly, of my inner world, but at the end of the day, when I encounter these traditions, they are always translated for me into my mother tongue before I can understand them within my own being.



## 5.9 Sorry

So much of my feminism leans on the work and thought of black women. It is a community that I both identify with and do not. My experience of the world is so different, and yet the themes of inclusion and exclusion, the themes of antiracism that emerge in the feminism of black women is truly remarkable. This extends beyond the work of Angela Davis, Kimberlé Crenshaw, Audre Lorde, bell hooks, and Roxanne Gay. There are many more whose work I will continue to explore in my own feminist journey. I want to recognize these women for their contributions to enlightening my own grief of my feminist journey. Artists, too, have given voice to the themes of womanhood that I have struggled through in my grief. They are the grandmothers of my feminism, their cells floating around in my blood, in conversation with my own cells. Their work lives within me, it has changed me. It is work born of their own anguish, but in reading their work, my burden is lighter. My grief is less heavy.

Grandmother, the alchemist, you spun gold out of this hard life,  
conjured beauty from the things left behind. Found healing where it  
did not live. Discovered the antidote in your own kit. Broke the curse  
with your own two hands. You passed these instructions down to  
your daughter who then passed it down to her daughter (Shire, 2016).

Their work, like the poetry of Warsan Shire, lands in my bones. This was the truth I absorbed when I listened and watched Beyoncé's visual album, *Lemonade*, much of which deals with a journey of grief. Her art was rooted in black feminism, in poetry, in the beauty and power of the black woman. To me, and to millions of women around the world, this art, *this art*, this *art* was an Intimate Dialogue with the artists who crafted the music, the poetry, the visualizations, on our womanhood, and the grief of one that is reflected in the grief of many. The album was recognized the world over, and women of colour took its meaning into our

blood. It didn't win album of the year at the Grammy Awards, but women of colour weren't voting for the winners, so it is no surprise that its worth was not understood by those whose vote counted. Their appreciation, to me, means nothing, because *Lemonade* stands for itself.

I am sorry for the interminable process of trying to relegate the work of black feminists to the margins. And I am grateful for the work of black artists and philosophers who continue to insist on their place in the center, and particularly in the center of feminist teaching:

It is important... that the experiences of all women are related to the political processes that express resistance to oppression. Feminists of all varieties need to ask the question, "what does it feel like to be a black woman in British society?" Until this sensitivity is seen as crucial in policy development, the effect of feminist activity will always be only to liberate white females (McKellar, 2013, p. 115).

We have needed black feminism to draw our attention to the reality that unless feminism is conscious of race, a construct though it may be, it will only benefit those who are considered 'mainstream' women, those who are white. *Lemonade* remains in my bloodstream. And even still, I recognize that it is black feminism, it, again, is paving the way for brown feminism. My experience is not that of a black woman. I do not have a "negro nose with Jackson Five nostrils" (Carter-Knowles, 2016, *Formation*) – this lyric is a celebration of the black body, it is a beautiful celebration of the black body that we so rarely enjoy at this level of stardom. What it did for black women cannot be measured in terms of celebration of their bodies that are infrequently offered as standards of beauty in consumerist culture. It will take time for brown feminism, the feminism that Chaudhry gives voice to in her work at the intersection of race, Islam, and feminism, to find its way to this level of reception. When it does, it will be thanks to our black feminist ancestors who are paving the way, and have been for years. This

Intimate Dialogue takes on the titles of the *Lemonade* tracks to celebrate and pay respect to the work that has paved the way for me to exist, as chimera, in today's world both internally and within popular culture.

### **5.10 Pray You Catch Me**

The women of scholarship are rarely caught in what we are taught formally at school. The Curriculum-as-Plan does not often or always come to teachers and classrooms with a particular thought to the contributions of women in history, or the ways in which feminist theory has enlivened the ways in which we think about the curriculum at all. In class, it was an endless slew of men that I was asked to contend with, to learn about, even to identify with. On the very rare occasion that my curriculum caught a woman, it was noticeable. Around her name there was a pause, and often an explanation of how she had been caught in our lesson, caught like a common cold, not like the magic that it was for me to see her achievements.

Marie Curie. Rosa Parks. Of my elementary and high school education, these are the only two female names that come to mind. Surely there were more women we learned about in school, but let's try the same trick with men. I'll start with the science and math guys: Pascal, Pythagoras, Albert Einstein, Isaac Newton, Benjamin Franklin, I could go on. Then the philosophers: Plato, Socrates, Aristotle, Kant, Nietzsche, John Stuart Mill, John Rawls, Adam Smith, and more. If I were to list political leaders the situation would be similar. As well as religious leaders. And, while I'm at it, the authors of the literature we were made to read. Of course, I don't recall every class I ever attended or every reading I was assigned, but I do know with certainty that I went through at least one undergraduate course on political

philosophy without encountering (a) a single female political philosopher or (b) a single political philosopher who was not of European origin. This is horrifying and quite possibly why, over the course of my time at Brown, an internationalization effort was undertaken to make the curriculum and the activities at the university broader in terms of where it reached for knowledge and wisdom. In fact, it wasn't until I arrived at the University of British Columbia to start my doctoral research that my curriculum seemed to catch women. And yet, even still, in relation to the works of men.

In her work on the Qur'an and Islamic Law, Ayesha Chaudhry (in press) outlines three modes of studying Islamic Law. The first is what she terms White Supremacist Islamic Studies, or WhiSIS. This version of Islamic Studies achieves legitimacy by centering whiteness in the scholarship. Chaudhry argues that while "falling in love" and then embracing Islam for a white scholar lends a kind of magical scholarship to the study of Islam, people, mostly of colour, who are born into Islam do not have the same reverence in scholarship circles. It is argued that we do not have the ability to achieve the required distance of rigorous study. The second mode of studying Islam she terms Patriarchal Islamic Legal Studies (PILS), which, instead of insisting upon whiteness as an indicator of objectivity, gender becomes the negotiator or hierarchical structures. PILS places men at the center of religious study, again, with some ability to create reasonable distance from their work that women, it is suggested, are incapable of doing. Somehow, WhiSIS and PILS scholarship took ownership of legitimacy in Islamic scholarship. This phenomenon is not only true in the field of Islamic Studies, but the trend extends well beyond a single discipline. The scholarship foundations of WhiSIS and PILS exists across disciplinary boundaries. And it is not a mystery how this happened. It is the perpetuation of old power structures based on

the notion of duality that Grumet and Stone (2013) describe, tracing the lineage of the words *liberalis* and *educere*. The root of *liberalis* comes from the name of the tree bark, on which texts were written in ancient Rome. *Liberalis* the tree bark that led to the recording of knowledge then became the root of the words ‘library’ and ‘liberal arts’ which then, in turn, came to connote a free man, one who could be distinguished from a slave because one was literate and the other was not. Freedom, to be liberated, was inherently tied to both masculinity and literacy. *Educere*

meant to lead out, setting up a contrast between here and there, making ‘there’ the goal and object of effort and interest. Here, the place to leave, has become associated with all that is female: the womb, home, childhood, the body—and education has functioned as a bridge between here and there, but a bridge with a single lane, routing children away from home into the public world (Grumet and Stone, 2013, p. 361).

The canon, in order to fulfill its mission of routing children, and thought more broadly, away from home and into the public world, had to reflect these traditional power structures of freedom, in particular, that of masculinity and, over time through colonialism, roots in European thought, as a source of wisdom. Though we may try to rescue the term “canon” from these roots, they linger in its definition, holding this history of domination. These notions tie intimately with the structures of capitalism, pushing us further away from the question of *what knowledge is of most worth* and closer towards *what knowledge is of most worth for a career*. The implied difference lies in the first question which leaves room for moral and spiritual questions alongside those of career. In limiting education to beyond the home, beyond the personal, and forcing it to ‘lead out’ to only the public life, our systems stripped life from what we learn and how we learn it, instead turning it into an experience of domination.

I can remember distinctly feeling this in the field of mathematics. Following a demonstration of method on the chalkboard by the teacher, my classmates and I were asked to fill out worksheet after worksheet to demonstrate our knowledge and expertise of the subject. I performed fairly well – the concepts were graspable, though disengaging. I think a part of my spirit was crushed in these moments, where the beauty that can be found in math was whittled down to nothing but numbers and word problems set out to trick us. Math was the enemy. Where, in this experience, was the space for exploration of a mathematical concept? Where was the relevance to myself, my life, my humanity? I recall asking this question of my teachers well into my high school days – what was the purpose of this knowledge, I would never use it, I claimed.

“You’ll need it if you want to be able to handle money... Or earn it.”

That did it.

It was perhaps this way of conceiving of education that led me, circuitous though my path was, to protest and pursue a doctorate in education where I neither handle money nor earn it.

Chaudhry (in press) offers a third strand of thought in Islamic Studies, the Intersectional Islamic Studies (IIS). As Chaudhry describes it, it is “the newest, the least entrenched” form of study that subverts the traditional power structures we have inherited from both ancient notions of wisdom and colonial visions of racial stratification. The IIS “seeks to engage in a form of Islamic studies that does not replicate racist, misogynist, classist structures of inequality” (Chaudhry, in press, p. 14). Feminist study that disrupts old logics is relatively new, in Islamic Studies as well as Curriculum Studies. It will take time for these works to feel like the canon of works that we need, until we really examine them

closely, and realize that, in engaging with thinkers that do not perpetuate old forms of power, we are already beginning to answer the question, *what knowledge is of most worth?*

## **5.11 Freedom**

If you have to fold  
to fit in  
it ain't right.

‘shape.’  
(Daley-Ward, 2015)

## Chapter 6: The Wake of Violence

### 6.1 The first 24 hours

I woke up that morning and it was still cold, so I slipped on Mum's white robe that my sister and I had bought for her for Christmas years earlier. It had since become iconic Mum, her shoulders wrapped in that soft white robe, feet in her slippers, at the kitchen table, surrounded by books, in front of her laptop. Somehow it had become her Dissertation Robe, as she wrestled with great thinkers, and crafted a piece of writing that embraced the canon and her own spirituality, writing of her experiences in establishing six Early Childhood Development centers in Afghanistan.

A few days earlier, on March 15, 2014, I had gone into Mum's room, where her robe had been lying, waiting for her return. It wasn't usual that I would wear her robe, but she was out of town. I was cold, so I slipped it on and went downstairs, just as she would have done. I made a cup of tea, just as she would have done. I took a photograph and sent it to her, naming the email "Transformation Complete" to which she replied:

*Nooooooo.....we have to have a proper ceremony for transferring the PhD robe!*

*Love you*

*Mum*

Our emails over the next five days were academic, we were sharing in our joy of exploring new ideas. She was on the tail end of her Ph.D. journey, and I had just begun a few months earlier. Our relationship took on new meaning in that time. We had attended class together and spent our evenings over dinner talking about hermeneutics and Ted Aoki. My father would participate, but it felt as though Mum and I were engaged in one long conversation,



from morning to evening each day and others in our lives were welcomed to slip and out of the conversation. We talked about everything. Every idea we had, every passage of reading we loved, we would share with each other. Carefully typed and cited, or just a photograph of a book's text. I was on campus a lot those days, so I would pick up library books for Mum that she requested, often finding ones I wanted to read as I browsed for her titles. We shared our books, too. As my mother, she was my first teacher. But to be a companion in philosophy, at this level, was something I had yet to witness between parent and child. She understood me inside and out, though we were often at odds and disagreed about things. We were wrestling with similar ideas, landing on different sides of the equations. Sometimes it was uncomfortable, and sometimes this discomfort was transformative. But this relationship, between me and Mum, was special. No one could deny that. No more special than that between Mum and my brother, her eldest child, nor that between Mum and my sister, her first daughter. It was ours, it was unique. In a family email thread on March 13, 2014, she wrote:

*Rishma darling,*

*Now you know that being pregnant is like writing your PhD thesis...tears come for no reason! your story about crying made me cry and now I have a headache!*

*I am heading to bed – exhausted but had to write and say I love you and don't cry baby.*

*Sam I can't believe I still haven't told I am so proud of you!*

*Love you*

*Mum*

My sister, Rishma, was pregnant and was experiencing the full range of emotions associated with it. We all were so excited about the arrival of the first member of the next generation of our family: a girl was about to join our family. Mum was no stranger to struggling with research, no stranger to the grief it can cause and the internal turmoil we endure as we explore ideas. She was proud of me for something I had written for class and sent to her. Grief came to me so suddenly I didn't realize it had arrived until days later.

March 20, 2014. I settled down to the large wooden desk and began to read. "Ghosts have an ethereal presence; they can be seen, often felt, but have no material substance. They exist on the fringes of our consciousness, neither physically real nor psychically unreal. They appear and disappear" (Doll and Broussard, 2002, p. 24). The phone rang. My brother on the other end sounded well, but rushed. "Hey, I just wanted to let you know that there's been an attack at the hotel in Kabul, but don't worry, they got the guys, and it may just be a little while before we hear from Mum because of the way the security may be run."

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"Well they may shut down cell phone service so she can't call, but all the reports are saying that no one was killed except the attackers. I just wanted to let you know in case you saw the news."

"Ok, I hadn't even seen that there was an attack. Thanks for letting me know. Love you."

"Love you, too. Talk to you later."

We hung up, and I continued reading. I had a meeting to prepare for later in the day, with a few conference presentations coming up a few weeks later. I wasn't worried. I checked Twitter, which gave me no cause to worry. The guys had been "got."

It had been a few hours and there had still been no news. I told my boyfriend that something happened at the hotel where Mum was staying and that we still hadn't heard from her. I told him I was worried, but now, thinking back on it, I was incapable of anything that really resembled worry. Today, I would describe what I was experiencing was more like a passing thought. But it was the closest thing to worry I knew back then.

Another hour passed.

*Any news from Mum?*

That is the last text message I ever sent to my brother's phone. We never decided that that would be the case, and we've never discussed it. It just was the last text message I'd send to him there. He never texted back.

He called me immediately after I sent that message.

I knew something was wrong because he called. In this day and age, we text if we can.

"Where are you?" His voice sounded OK. Maybe he just needed me to do something at home, I reasoned. But something felt different.

"I'm at home, what's happening?"

He allowed himself to break. Carefully, because even then, he knew he needed to be strong again in not too long. He was driving through Toronto traffic to tell my sister in person.

"They've killed Mum."

I had been standing and then suddenly I was on my knees.

I don't know exactly how I responded to this, but in my head, I know that I didn't understand at all what was happening. What did he mean they've killed Mum?

“I’m on my way to go tell Rish right now. We need to call Dad’s office and tell them to cancel his patients for the rest of the week. Can you call his secretary and tell her to just cancel everything and we’ll explain when he gets home?”

“I can’t.” I didn’t really understand what he was saying and I didn’t know how to exist in those moments. Logistics phone calls were beyond my capacity.

“I don’t want Dad driving home with this knowledge, he might get into an accident.”

“You’re driving now. Are you being safe?”

“Yes, very safe.”

“What do I do?”

“Rishma and I will fly home tonight.” We hung up with our usual “love yous.”

I was supposed to meet a friend that evening. I cancelled those plans. I later found out that his family had been killed in the violence in Iraq. I called my professor at UBC. I fumbled through some explanation of what happened. He kindly let others in my department know.

I really had no idea what to do with myself. I tried calling my boyfriend. He was at a lunch and so wasn’t looking at his phone. I texted him that something had happened. I received a call from two young Afghan men who worked with Mum closely in Kabul. They are like family to me. I couldn’t understand what they said, just tears and a slew of apologies. I told them that it will be OK, having no idea myself if that was true. It wasn’t their fault.

I went for a walk and found myself walking towards the house my parents had bought for high school and university students from Afghanistan. These Sparks Scholars, as we call them, live in Vancouver as part of our family, at that time, in a home just a few blocks from

ours. I rang the doorbell and walked in. Dazed. They all looked worried and I told them that there was an attack at the hotel, Mum had been killed.

No, they told me. She's OK, they told me. I misunderstood. I thought they had spoken to her.

I was confused. My brain already didn't want to accept this news, and then, here were my adopted siblings telling me that I was wrong. Was I wrong? Was this all a really terrible experience that had been cleared up with a phone call from Mum? Why did she call them and not me? Did she think I wasn't following the news as closely? Had she tried? I felt badly for having missed this imagined call from her.

I called my brother. I'm confused, I told him. He was on his flight with my sister. Their flight was about to take off, he didn't have long. "These are our friends, Sam, they wouldn't have told me she was dead if they weren't sure." Then he had to turn off his phone. Doubt lingered, but I knew I needed to squash it.

I told my adopted Afghan siblings. We sat together and cried. And then I needed to get back home before Dad arrived. I wasn't ready to cry with others yet. One of my adopted brothers walked me home, despite my insistence that I was OK. His arm tightly around me, he held me up as we walked the 20 blocks back home. I realized as we were walking that he, too, lost his parents to violence in Afghanistan. He understood, I think, what I did not yet understand. He knew grief intimately. He got me home safely.

I insisted on being alone, so he left. I lay down on the floor in our living room, the sun pouring in through the skylight, and just stared at the ceiling.

*What do you do when you've just found out your mother's been killed in a violent attack?*

I really didn't know what to do with myself. I went for a walk. It was unusually warm at this point. I was crying. I found some bleachers in the park, and sat on them, looking out to the field, and beyond, to the mountains. Could she really be dead?

I texted my boyfriend:

*i feel like someone is going to call*

*and say it isn't true*

*like this was some kind of monumental fuck up*

“They wouldn't have told me she was dead if they weren't sure.” My brother's words came back to me again.

I kept wondering what to do, until, eventually my father came home.

I told him right as he walked through the door. I felt badly that so many other people already knew, and he had been oblivious, finishing his day at work. We sat together, quietly, absorbing the news. At some point, Mum's two brothers who live in Vancouver appeared on our doorstep with their wives. I hadn't even thought to call them. They didn't ask if it was true. I think my face probably told them everything they needed to know: their little sister was, indeed, dead.

My siblings came home. I don't recall much else from that night. My sister and I shared my bed that night. Neither of us wanted to be alone. It was Navroz, the day of the Persian New Year, celebrated by Ismailis all over the world. We began to receive emails of congratulations from those who had not yet heard the news. One mass email that both my sister and I received described a friend's research into the significance of Navroz:

Beyond simply celebrating the advent of spring. Husayn b. Ya'qub wishes to explain more profound subtleties. Husayn b. Ya'qub wishes to explain more profound subtleties. Nawruz is not just the time when

the sun enters into the constellation of Aries, signaling the advent of the equinox and the transformation of the physical world with the arrival of spring. For the believers, the true Nawruz occurs when their actions, deeds, and very existence are transformed so that their faults are replaced by virtues. Thus, while the people of exterior forms take Nawruz to be the time when the fields are to be down, the people of the interior meaning realize that this world is the sowing ground for the next world, and act accordingly (Virani, 2008, pp. 164 – 5).

My sister and I lay awake reading and re-reading this. Mum believed so strongly in the afterlife and had spent so much of her life preparing for it. The words from our friend, who wrote them not knowing about Mum, were endlessly comforting. The idea that she may find some peace in the afterlife is something I clung to that night, when nothing else made sense. Indeed, on Navroz, she had been transformed from the physical world into the world of spirit.

I slipped out of bed that morning – *ding*

*I just want you to know that I love you. I was at a loss of words because I was feeling such incredible love for you and your family and was not sure how to express it. I haven't stopped thinking about you since we talked. You don't need to reply, I am sure you are swamped in communication and management and shock. Just know that I am here. And I will be here throughout everything, as a pillar. Forever.*

*I love you so much. You are my sister.*

earlier than usual, but there was no point in lying there. I couldn't sleep. I went downstairs and realized, for the first time, the heaviness that grief brings. Each step I took – *ding*

*Samira I just can't believe how ugly this world can be and I don't know why these things happen. Your mother was so brave for putting herself out there for a cause she truly believed in. I love her for that and so look up to your mother. That same*

*admiration I have for her, I also have for you. You have amazing spirit and drive and so want to help the world. You are beautiful, your mother was beautiful, and you are definitely her daughter. I'm always here for you Samira. I love you so much. Please please call me at any time you need. And again.. Tell me when I can see you and I'll be on the first flight over. I love you.*

it became clearer to me that gravity had set foot in my heart and was pulling me, intensely, towards the earth. So much so that that night, I started sleeping in the basement, a small room that was Mum's office, surrounded by her books, diplomas, and art that had not yet found a home on our walls.

A police car pulled up in front of our house early on March 21<sup>st</sup>. Two police officers rang the doorbell and I opened the door. "Do you know why we're here?" they asked. I don't know what I said to them. "I think so" I now imagine myself replying. They came in and told us that the government had been informed of Mum's murder. They thought they were bringing the news to us, but we already knew. We have dear friends there, friends who called Mum "Mum" – they are more than friends, they are like family. We knew more than the police officers did at that point. They left, and the media showed up.

I don't think the question of *how* she died had fully formed in my mind. I understood that there had been shooters – *ding*

*Dear Samira:*

*In the Christian religion we would say that today Heaven welcomes a new Angel. Your mother was such.*

*I know her spirit will live on through you.*



but knew nothing of the scenario that had unfolded at the hotel. We didn't even have her body back, we were suspended in this awful phase of disbelief. Dad and my brother were thinking about going to Kabul to get her. I didn't want them to go, or I wanted to go as well. I didn't have a firm plan in my mind of which way I felt, though sending them off felt like a horrible idea.

It was Navroz, a time for rejuvenation. The New Year, a time for resolutions. But I couldn't think of anything beautiful *ding*

*I just heard that your mother was at the Serena. I am so sorry to hear that senseless news.*

*Email is a terrible format for this, but I am guessing that you are with one another, or traveling to be together. My thoughts and prayers are with you and your family for peace and love at this time. You have all been doing some amazing seva [service] - I know that place is so important to each you, and so this must be particularly hurtful.*

*I can't even begin to imagine how you must feel. You are all loved.*

The reporters came, and wanted our story. I didn't understand what had happened to my life, and I couldn't find ways to craft it into a narrative they could understand. My brother was incredible, he spoke to every news agency that called. I did one interview and couldn't bear to do another. I straightened my hair for the interview because I thought that's what Mum would have wanted. The news of Mum's death had gotten out, and our world of people, our tribe from all over the world, started to email and call. Suddenly in this horror, we were never waiting long for our phones to light up with another email. Kind words from those who wanted us to know we weren't alone. It was as if we were watching the news spread from our little nucleus to the edges of the earth. We were getting emails from people in Australia,

Afghanistan, India, Pakistan, Tajikistan, England. The emails were not long, and mostly were not profoundly different from one another, but people around the world were bearing witness and sharing in our ache. People who believed in different gods, different heroes, different politics, all recognized our grief, our burden, and tried in their own ways, to help us carry it.

*Ding. It is with profound sorrow and shock we heard the tragic news about your mom. Please accept our deepest condolences on your loss. It is always hard to understand and reason why such things happen to good people. Yet all we can do is pray to Allah that may her soul rest in eternal peace and may He give you all and your dad the strength to bear this loss. It is hard for us to believe this happened and so we can only imagine how you all must be feeling. At this time all we can offer is our thoughts and prayers for her soul.*

*Once again our heartfelt condolences. We will keep you all in our prayers.*

*Ding. Just saw the news. I'm thinking of you. Anything you need; just ask.  
much love*

*Ding. I am so very sorry to hear that your mother was killed in Kabul. On Monday (past), she suddenly popped into my mind, and I could see her face very clearly. When I was a child a Minister in our church told us that on these occasions, when someone pops into your mind, say a prayer for him/her. I said a prayer for your Mom then. I will remember her as a sweet, intelligent, brave, and very kind woman who was doing extraordinary work. She is an inspiration and I admire her immensely. My thoughts and prayers are with you and your family now. If I can be helpful in any way, please let me know.*

*Ding. It must feel like a dream and be so hard to process. You and your family are in my thoughts and prayers. And her soul is eternal and I'm praying for its eternal peace. Please, please let me know if there is anything me or my family can do to help at this time. If there's a way I can come to the ceremonies, I'd like to try. I feel related to your family even though I haven't met them all. Let me know if you have a chance once the details are sorted out.*

*I love you unconditionally.*

We made it to *Jamatkhana* that evening.

*Ding. I just heard about your mom and I want to tell you how incredibly sorry I am for your loss. I can't imagine the pain your family must be going through. It's honestly such a tragedy and I hope nothing but strength, courage, and peace for you and your family. If there is anything I can do for you, please please let me know. I love you so much and am here for you if you need me. Love you immensely. Praying for you.*

*Ding. Dear Samira - I am so sorry to hear about this. These are the very kind of events that are so unsettling and that take time to process. I would have very much like to meet your mother, as you are a kindred spirit and I assume that she was as well. Take care of you and yours in the coming days and weeks.*

*I shall give you a 'Standing Deferred' mark for the course. This will provide you with until August 23 for the paper, and we can adjust the mark from there. I hope this will provide you some respite for now.*

*Ding. Although I cannot confirm everything I am reading and hearing- and hope sincerely that I am mistaken, I fear I am not. My whole heart is with you and your family right now.*

*If there is anything I can do at all please let me know. Wishing you all the love, strength and courage I can imagine during this time.*

It was supposed to be a night of celebration, but the whole community was muted. I could barely stand. I cried through the whole ceremony. My sister, sitting next to me, did the same. We hadn't brought enough tissues with us. They announced Mum's death, but they didn't need to. Everyone already knew. Everyone was crying with us. We were surrounded by love. Long hugs that descended into tears. There was food that was going to be served to the whole community that night in celebration of Navroz. The volunteers gave us an entire tray as we left to go home.

As we drove home,

*Ding. I am so so sorry. I am truly devastated and shocked. I do not know if any of my words can give you any strength or comfort but I am enveloping you in so much love right now. So much love. So much love*

*We love you. So much.*

*Praying for your family. I hope the pain, hurt and anger ease and the fog clears.*

*I love you and I wish I could do more than send a measly email.*

*Ding. I just saw the news from Afghanistan. I don't know for sure, but was your mother one of the two Canadians?*

*Words fail, but I just wanted you to know that you and your family are in my thoughts. I am so sorry for your loss. I hope I'm wrong, and it was someone else with the same last name.*

*Know that you have many friends who love you and will support you in whatever ways you need.*

we all agreed that Mum would have been glad to see us make it to *Jamatkhana* that evening, that she was there with us. And we all felt lucky that our community, from day one, wanted to feed us. We had made it through the first day.

*Ding. My heart is simply breaking for you and your family over the loss of your beautiful mother. There are simply no words that suffice. Though we are separated by hundreds of kilometers, my heart is right there with you right now. You are firmly in my thoughts.*

*I never had the pleasure of meeting your mother, but knowing you, it is so abundantly apparent what a special, giving, soulful and intelligent woman she was. Your family is such a gift to this world.*

## **6.2 What Happened?**

There were many people in our home over the next days, and, for the most part, we needed the company. It gave us strength to have people come home and talk with us. At this point, I began to wonder what happened. How was she killed?

*Ding. I have spent the last 18 hours at a loss of words, trying to articulate a message for you all. Karim and Rishma, you should know that Samira and I bonded because of our mothers and their similarities. From their unbreakable spirits, their quirks, their beauty, their strength, and their unmatched ability to wear more hats than fathomable, they are cut from the same cloth. As Samira and I spent nights discussing from India to Boston, your mother was a magnet and she was glue at the same time. She rallied people for impactful causes and constructed legacies.*

When you find out that there was an attack like this and a loved one is killed, questions abound. But I also had to get used to thinking of her in the past tense.

What were her last moments on earth? Was she threatened? Did she know what was happening? Where was she shot? Did she suffer? Did she cry? Was she scared? Did she fight back? Did she have regrets? Did she know I love her? Did she know that without a doubt, or just wish it?

*Ding. I've just heard the news and called you but even your voicemail is full. I am so sorry for your loss. I cannot even begin to understand what you and your family are going through, but please remember that I am here, we are all here for you. Let's just remember how amazing she was, how she made this world brighter. I will never forget her smile. She will be truly missed and will always be remembered.*

*We are all here for you and love you very much. Please let me know if there's anything I can do for you. I will try to call again.*

I avoided the news for as long as I could. I didn't want to dwell on information beyond "Mum is dead." But, slowly, I came to know things about what happened. There were shooters. A family of Afghans had been shot, both parents had been killed, and even after the mother had begged for her children's life, they were all shot as well. Two of them died, but one survived. The rest of his family dead, around him. Did Mum watch another mother beg for mercy for her children? Did Mum see babies being executed?

Then another piece: guests ran. Was she one of them? Did she run?

Guests threw plates at the gunmen. Gunboys, I remind myself. Gunboys. Did she throw a plate? Did she fight for her life?

*Ding. Your mother was the bravest of mothers, boldly educating, caring, loving and believing in the power of education. And you are her highly attuned and sensitive daughter who also understands this level of care and service. You too are brave to stand before the media and share your mother's vision. I could see when your mother attended class in the fall that she was very proud of you. She is a mother to emulate and your are daughter to continue caring for others in this world.*

*I am thinking of you and feel terribly sad about your loss. But there was a very strong and determined love in your mother that I would imagine she has passed on to you and your family. It takes courage to educate in this world. Both you and your mother are very inspiring to me.*

I have always been a dreamer. Our breakfast table has always been regaled with stories of my nighttime escapades, fantastical but with hints of reality so strong that they could just be possible. In my dreams I have farmed and fished, swam miles, married the devil, killed, been hunted, been a stack of papers floating through a forest, and I have held my mother's hand. For weeks I dreamed of her. Beautifully painful dreams. At night, my subconscious crafted exquisite realities that I barely dared think of during the day. She was fine, just recovering with her brother in England. The week between hearing the news and finally having her body back with us felt unending. It was ten days before we buried her.

And then: but we buried you.

I've been recovering, that was just a decoy. Why did we need a decoy?

And each morning I had to experience again the realization that decoys don't exist.

My dreams have become more infrequent, but the eternity of the heartbreak remains real. I have recorded each dream to the best of my ability, for no reason except that I might

remember the alternate-realities I have lived in the Imaginal world. For these nights stay with me throughout my days, a lingering fragrance of another world where she and I meet again.

I am there in the restaurant with her as I see a gun assembled. I am racing towards her, screaming that I love her that it might be the last thing she knows on this earth, even if she can't see me coming her way before it happens. I hear her scream that she loves me too. That she knows that every moment between us that might be brushed with regret may be cast aside for they are nothing. Absolutely nothing in the face of my love for her, and hers for me. I woke up hoarse and crying. My body, heart, and mind had experienced something, but had it happened?

I wasn't there for her that evening, I know. But where does this dream exist? It is in the depths of my heart, it is closer to me than my jugular. Though painful, it is healing, and perhaps simultaneously, re-wounding. Though unreal to you, it is real to me. This dream happened in my life, though through no empirical understanding of experience.

*Ding. I hope you are both well. Please kindly find the attachment, my today's report.*

*My family members are calling me everyday [sic] and asking me to convey their deepest condolence to you all.*

*Since the early years that I remember, my grandfather ever never cried for his siblings lost. I recall that his sister, mother and brother passed away and he did not cry, but early in the morning on Nawroz when I told mum's story to him, he and I could not stop our tears, not at all. This tells me that how a great person mum was and what a great soul she has that even the hard heart people were melt by her legacy.*

*I feel very lonely in here without mum. I saw her today in our TT session, she was*



*smiling and was very happy. I also saw her when I went to FMIC. I see her everywhere and I can't believe that she is not with us now rather she is with us, very closely.*

*We are sharing the same pain with you all, we hear and see everyone in here going through very sad moments because of our beloved mum's absence.*

I started to receive the daily reports from the Sparks schools in Afghanistan that Mum had started. Each email, addressed to me, detailed the goings on at the six schools. The emails always copied Mum's email address.

*Ding. Guys, these beats are awesome!*

Not every emailer knew what was happening in my inbox then.

*Ding. i learned just today of you mother's death.*

*i am so terribly sorry.*

*perhaps there is solace in this one inarguable fact:*

*that despite her absence,*

*she remains your mother.*

*and you her daughter.*

*no fortune, however tenacious and outrageous, will change that.*

*that the both of you remain bound by a force which frustrates every law of nature and chance.*

### **6.3 Ten Days Later**

Her body finally arrived, ten days after she was killed. The most difficult ten days of my life. We had been in a state of turmoil waiting for her to return to us. In those ten days it had been impossible to fully accept our loss, she was still living on, somewhere out there.

Our community has a system of preparing the body for the family for a last viewing, and then once more in preparation for the funeral. We were allowed to touch her hands and feet, but were cautioned not to touch her head or core during the last viewing. I vaguely remember someone telling us that this was custom, but I think he was just saying that because she might've been shot in the head and the chest.

I recognized her by her hands. I did not know her by her face. It was distorted.

We buried her 11 days after she was killed. I cried over her body when my turn to pray over her came. There's a photograph of my dad and my brother, taking her body out of *jamatkhana* with all the men of the community. My sister and I stayed inside, and then left separately.

The men in my family drove behind the hearse on the way to the cemetery. They said a white bird flew above the hearse the whole way there. I envied that they witnessed that.

### **6.4 Aftermath**

I bet it is universal that when a loved one dies, the people who aren't there in their last moments are filled with questions. And these questions follow us, some might even say haunt us, for years. Beyond the obvious and horrible connections I may feel with those families who have lost loved ones in similar ways, the demons follow along in all of life.

*Ding. I learned this morning that my roommate's father was also killed at the Serena Hotel that evening. She was away the past couple weeks, and I thought it was for spring break and she was simply staying at extra week, but she came home this morning and I saw her in the kitchen and she told me everything. I'm beyond devastated. I didn't know whether to write you or not, but I thought about you and my roommate all day and I just felt the need to reach out, to send you one of the strong hugs I gave to her this morning, and tell you that I will always think about you when I think about Afghanistan. I'm so sorry again. This coincidence has me speechless.*

In so many films I've watched in the last years involved, in some way, death as the result of gun violence. It is shocking, actually, how unaware I was of the prevalence of this in our media until these last years. Now, I find myself hyper-aware. Each storyline offering some kind of version of my mother's last moments on earth. Did she speak to the killers like this? Did they shoot her without even looking at her, their real target somewhere else?

Every time a person is shot, I open my eyes. I do not want to see the memories that lurk in that thin sliver of skin, between my eyes and the world. No, I open my eyes and look for the families of the victims. Perhaps a parent, sibling. Especially a daughter. Every time a person is shot, I open my eyes, but I don't need to, I know the family's story in my bones. In my bones, I know that the world is a place filled with fear. The ones who shout the loudest and flail their darkness around like a badge of honour, those are the ones who are the most afraid. We listen to them, talk about them in our news and in our homes, and by giving their fear voice, we act as their nightlights, keeping their monsters at bay. So, they continue to rail about the demons they have seen coming for us, hoping we'll stay a little longer by their sides. But sometimes, all we need to do is open our eyes, to not look away, and come to see

the other side of things. It has been almost three years since my mother was killed by teenage boys flailed their darkness around. Small men holding small guns can do a world of harm.

Every time a person is shot, I open my eyes, because a world has been lost, and I want to catch a glimpse into that world before it is gone forever.

A glimpse for you: my sister arrives home and tells the family that she is pregnant. I already know, so I am taking photographs on my new camera. They all turn out blurry, but, my God, you can almost touch the happiness we are all feeling.

In the time since my mother was killed, I feel I have aged a thousand years and am still an infant learning to do things on my own for the first time. It has taken me years to learn to sleep again.

## 6.5 One

I am surprised at how quickly I was able to come to peace with my mother's killers. I think back to my emotional journey in the last years, and their existence was a tragic one for me. It wasn't until recently that I was pushed to think about why this forgiveness was so easily found. The truth is that I have held feelings about the boys since the day I learned of their existence, since the day they killed my mother. The first feeling I had was anguish. I was feeling anguish in the loss of my mother and I *ached* that there were others who also were killed that night. It didn't matter to me that they were the ones who brought violence to the restaurant. They were not *just* killers. They were not *just* terrorists (a name I reluctantly use). They were *boys*. Boys who had grown up in war, grown up in violence, grown up in hate. Boys who chose to kill a woman (amongst others) who could have been their mother. I believed, and continue to believe that if they had met my mother under different

circumstances in Afghanistan, their lives would have found something to inspire them towards peace. But, fundamentally, I realized that their families were suffering as I was suffering, and that they suffered as my mother did. Their deaths did not make my mother's death right, nor more palatable. Their deaths were inconsequential to my loss. And I am sure that their family's lives were not inundated with the kind of love my life was filled with following Mum's death.

It also occurred to me that forgiveness was insisted in the very rituals of burial. On the day I buried my mother, I sat in *Jamatkhana*, and listened as a friend from Afghanistan recited verses from the Qur'an in prayer for her soul. *Qulu Allah Wahad. Qulu Allah Wahad. Qulu Allah Wahad.* The verse, repeated three times, urged me to "Say: God is One. Say: God is One. Say: God is One."

God is One. God is One. God is One.

By the third repetition of this verse, the oneness of God had enveloped me to the point where both *Godliness* and *isness* had dissolved into *Oneness*.

*One.*

I thought back to the Brethren of Purity and their epistles that cover topics that range from mathematics (even the most basic arithmetic) to natural philosophy, to the science of the soul and intellect, to theology (el-Bizri, 2012, xvi). They express that intellectual pursuit is an act of faith, and that spirituality infuses all in the pursuit of understanding. It is from a stance of humility that the world is approached – each chapter of each epistle starts with an invocation to the Beloved to facilitate this endeavor of learning, both on the part of the author and the reader.

I was drawn to these works – the mystery of their authors, the wonderment with which each subject is approached - it spoke to me. They were able to show a side of mathematics to me that had only existed in poetry in my own education. Where words once danced and played in my mind and in my heart, suddenly, numbers became intriguing, resonant.

I was, and remain convinced, that we all need to understand the world in a different way. We are not comfortable with difference. We are imperfect. In our increasingly globalized world, we are hunkering down into our worlds and fear that if we engage with the other that we will become the other. It was in the context of our present day challenges in the world of living together in kindness, as well as the challenges in an education system that seems to turn away from that which humbles us, that which binds us: our grief.

The first epistle of the *Ikhwan al-Safa* is entitled *On Arithmetic: Being the first epistle from the first section of the Epistles of the Brethren of Purity, on the Propaedeutical and Mathematical Sciences*. The epistle is made up of 25 chapters, each of which deals with a different aspect of arithmetic. It is no coincidence that mathematics is the first step in the *Ikhwan's* work: “the philosophers have put the study of the science of numbers before the study of the rest of the propaedeutic sciences because this science is potentially embedded in everyone... from it one takes examples for everything else that can be known” (el-Bizri, 2012, p. 96). Mathematics, for the *Ikhwan* was not an isolated subject, but a foundational subject for the study of the soul – it was a basic means of understanding the world, and as such acts as a metaphor for the ‘higher’ subjects, including philosophy and theology.

I never felt any excitement over the number one until I discovered the works of the Brethren. When I was learning numbers, it seemed like the most obvious and easy number to

learn – it is where we start to count, but saying “one” without following it with “two” was never an achievement. It simply didn’t *count* as counting to simply say “one.” Even learning to write the number 1 was underwhelming: “everyone knows it is just a line!” – the simplicity and prevalence of the number made it seem so insignificant, so easily brushed past. Later in life, one had the unenviable status of being the “loneliest number” (Nilsson, 1968) of them all.

To the Brethren, one is seen to have two meanings – the first is its true meaning (or perhaps, “literal”), while the second is its metaphorical meaning.

In describing ‘the one’ in its literal meaning, the Brethren state that:

In its proper usage it is a thing that cannot be partitioned or divided. And everything that cannot be divided is one when looked upon from the aspect by which it cannot be divided. If you wish, you may say: “One” is that in which there is nothing else but itself, insofar as it is one’ (El-Bizri, p. 67).

One – the unique, individual, single. This definition of one seems to match that of the original understanding of the term *atom*: “an indivisible entity” and “a hypothetical particle, minute and indivisible, held to be one of the ultimate particles of matter” (Atom, OED, 2017). Similarly, *one* was held as the ultimate number in that it “is the source and principle of all numbers, and from it all the numbers are generated, both whole and fractional, and they may be reduced to it again” (El-Bizri, p. 68). One exists in all numbers, whether explicitly or implicitly – rather than finding the origin at zero, as I had often understood the world of math, it is indeed at one that all conceptions of numbers begin. Very little can be made out of the nothingness that zero offers – a number divided by zero, a number multiplied by zero, a number added to zero – this origin is an origin of emptiness. Understanding the origin at one, however, fills the emptiness – every number is born of one, every number is simply one in a

different form. One is everywhere, and often invisible, unless we know how and where to look.

In this sense, I begin to understand that describing one is a way for us mortals to begin to fathom the Beloved. *Say: God is One*. One, the beauty that we can only see if we know how to look. One, that part of each of us that exists as love, that unites us. One, the ineffable part of each person that called them to reach out to me when Mum died, using the language of their traditions, to help carry my burden.

The Brethren beautifully describe this meaning of One:

Every aggregate [jumla; multitude] that is considered a unity. So, for example, ten is called a 'unit', and a hundred is called a 'unit', and a thousand is called a 'unit'. One is the epitome of oneness, like black is the epitome of blackness; and oneness is the attribute of being one, as blackness is the quality of being black (El-Bizri, p. 67).

As El-Bizri explains of the Brethren's position on the metaphorical quality of one: "the one is a multitude that acts as an undivided unity...a whole that is made up of units" (El-Bizri, p. 18). It is in this understanding of one that a sense of cosmopolitanism emerges. If the true *one* refers to God, then the metaphorical *one* refers to the cosmos in its unyielding diversity, ineffably bound by an essence that is the same.

We begin to understand the notion of the "macroanthropos" of the Brethren: that the cosmos is indeed a singular being (El-Bizri, xvi) and in taking one life, we are taking the life of humanity and in saving a life, we are saving that of humanity. This a concept beautifully reflected in the poetry of the Sufi poet Saadi Shirazi who wrote:

Human beings are members of a whole,  
In creation of one essence and soul.  
If one member is afflicted with pain,  
Other members uneasy will remain.  
If you have no sympathy for human pain,  
The name of human you cannot retain.



(Axworthy, 2010, p. 110)

Indeed, once we recognize that one in its true sense exists everywhere, there is an uncanny recognition that there is no existence of the concept of 'two' because we, as a cosmos, encompass a unit, elements of a cohesive and indivisible entity from which we are unable to separate. Emerging out of the Theory of the Big Bang, we understand our world to have been created out of an explosion of a single (one) point some thirteen billion years ago. All matter on this earth and in our universe is understood to be from this single point, from this unified entity. We all originate from the one, and therefore we can be considered, metaphorically, the unit that the Brethren describe. Indivisible – a collective of parts that form a whole.

A humbling thought, indeed. As I researched the Brethren, I came to realize how necessary it is to engage with epistemologies and ontologies that reach beyond our historically canonical works. Perhaps I forgave the boys so quickly because our oneness was insisted upon so readily and so often in my theological mother tongue.

## **6.6 Peace**

It was her time.

We all have to go eventually.

This was faster than other ways people leave this world, there's comfort in that.

Whatever she suffered, it is over now.

Words I have heard over, and over, and over again.

Word that others have used to try to comfort me, to somehow make my mother's death easier to comprehend. To accept.

But almost every night when I close my eyes, I think of her. Sometimes, I think of her last moments on earth. And every cell in my body comes to a rolling boil, not in anger, but in what I now call touchable sadness. My mother was executed by young boys who were part of the larger Taliban organization in Afghanistan. I have watched the video footage released of the night of the attack. Grainy images of her killers show the nervous excitement they hold as they pass through the security at the hotel where she was staying. They look nervous with excitement. I wonder if that is how they felt, or if this is, again, my mind playing tricks on me. Pressing assumptions onto them with my understanding of the world. One of those four pulled a trigger and ended her life, and I have no idea which one it is. Maybe that is not important.

I eventually wrote to my friend's roommate, the other young woman who lost a loved one in the same attack:

*Many people who have lost loved ones around me have said that they speak to them and often they'll speak back in signs. I'm not sure I have found that understanding of the world yet, but I have found that writing, running and crying in public seem to be my most frequent ways of dealing with things. I get closer to 'normal' each day and then realize how far from normal I am each day - it is a cycle, I suppose. I want to call my Mum all the time and share the funny story of the day or the sweet thing that someone said to me about her. I wanted to share the imperfections of my grieving process with you because people only ever want to hear how I'm getting better and doing OK, and you may be feeling the same way.*

There is a lot I don't know about her death. But I now can say without any shame that her passing in that way is an unacceptable reality of our world. One that many experience on

a daily basis. It is one of the greatest weights I must bear to know that each day, families around the world lose loved ones to violence. I used to hold shame for calling her loss unacceptable, because I believed that grieving meant eventually reaching a fate of acceptance. I didn't want to seem ungrateful for the reasons I should find comfort. The things I have repeated to myself again and again as a mantra. *It was her time.* But, the loss of my mother to violence will always be unacceptable. This is the indelible reality of violence.

And it is an “unquiet understanding” (Davey, 2006) that I hold today. We commit acts of violence against one another in surprisingly cruel ways, with surprising regularity. Becoming attuned to it in this way has become its own form of burden, but it is not only my own to carry. In hearing the cries of those suffering violence each day, I begin to become an echo, in my own voice.

## Chapter 7: Conclusion

People can be astonishingly cruel to one another. This cruelty is observable in our news, online in the comments sections across websites, in acts of violence and hate across the world each day, and in our schools, where these behaviours are neither necessarily learned nor unlearned today. Schools have an opportunity, particularly in North America where children are expected and legally obliged to attend school for at least some time in life. Schools are sites where cruelty can be excised, but we cannot do this without addressing the cruelty, it cannot be ignored.

In the past, conversations surrounding privilege have emerged that offer us opportunities to explore the ways in which our lives are easier than those of other people, in an effort to create space for greater kindness and deeper understanding. I argue that this experiment in privilege has failed. People are unwilling to see their privilege because there is a sense that privilege means Total Privilege, which is emphatically untrue. No one person is universally privileged and no one person is universally not privileged. The conversation becomes increasingly challenging when people insist that privilege exists, and others just want to delineate the ways in which their lives have not been privileged. Neither side of the conversation enters into the dialogue wanting to hear what the other has to say, and nobody leaves that conversation with anything more than a sense of frustration.

Instead, I posit that grief is one uniting reality that all humans share. We grieve the loss of loved ones and the loss of dignity when others treat us disrespectfully. We grieve the misunderstanding of our religions, and we grieve our poverty. We grieve the loss of a sense of mattering in this world. Grief exhibits itself in different ways across cultures around the

world, but in this research, I understood grief to simply be its etymological meaning: heaviness. Grief, in the context of this dissertation, is that which adds heaviness to our lives. And this is an avenue in which to skip the conversation of privilege and enter into a conversation of grief. My grief is different from yours, but if we both enter the conversation with the premise that we both experience grief, we may be more receptive to hearing stories of grief, and by extension, may even realize our privilege in the process, though that is not necessarily the goal. Instead, by engaging grief, we may be able to ameliorate the tension of the recent uptick in violence and bullying schools have witnessed, as well as begin to rectify the past injustices that have transformed some of our students into ghosts of the curriculum.

Grief, being a universal experience, despite being experienced differently by each individual is the perfect avenue through which a curriculum of cosmopolitanism may be crafted. While teachers and students may prefer not to engage with the difficult experiences of being alive on this earth, there is a certain joy in attending to grief. David Jardine (2015) explains that:

There is a joy to be had in the practice of turning towards suffering and letting it be what it is. It is not had in reveling in the pain of others or wallowing in their or one's own endurances. It is had because that practice, properly practiced, can change the nature of that suffering and our relation to it (Jardine, 2015, p. 231).

It is foolish to turn away from suffering, and it is, in many ways, unethical in the school context (and I would argue beyond the school context as well). Not only is learning through suffering – *pathei mathos* – well theorized in hermeneutics, but it is also an important in coming to live a full life. We have an ethical responsibility to one another, which is uncovered by Levinas who argues that to see the face of the other is to be confronted by the “Thou shalt not kill” (Levinas, 2006, p. 89). In the classroom, the ethic is care, and to care

for our students is to both engage with that which weighs heavily upon them, as well as enable them to lighten the load of others as they go through life.

If we can attend to our own grief and the grief of others, we may transform it into something that enables us to hold joy and sorrow simultaneously. The joy that I have uncovered over the course of this research, in attending to grief, lies in the unfolding of the curriculum of cosmopolitanism.

## **7.1 The Curriculum of Grief**

### **7.1.1 Curriculum, Care and Cosmopolitanism**

Aoki (1986) suggested that there exist two forms of curriculum in the classroom. First, there is the Curriculum-as-Plan, which he describes as a document that arrives to each classroom from beyond, usually from a government that determines what the curriculum should be. It arrives with an expectation that all students across a province or state are the same, and will learn in the same way. It arrives with no nuance, no sense of the teacher reading it, no sense of the child who will receive it. The Curriculum-as-Lived-Experience, on the other hand, is the curriculum that exists in the world of the classroom. It is the experience of the student and the teacher, in the classroom, working together through the curriculum. Aoki (1986) suggests that teachers often dwell “in the zone of between” (p. 161), where they hold both the curriculum-as-plan requirements in their mind, while interacting and engaging with the unique situation in which they find themselves with the particular students they face at that time. There are two important links to the Intimate Dialogue above.

The first is that Aoki assumes an ethic of care in the context of teachers dwelling between the curriculum-as-plan and the curriculum-as-lived-experience. Teachers, I have

come to learn, wield enormous power to inspire and also to wound. When I left my school where terrorists were named as “Samira’s people,” my family and I chose not to make waves. We didn’t make any announcements or pursue any legal actions. The other parents called mine and asked why I left, which eventually they shared truthfully. One parent informed us that there had been one Muslim girl in the school the year before me and she had also left because of difficulties she had with this particular teacher. She was a hijabi, I can only imagine the torment he put her through. He had made fun of a beautiful, soft turtleneck I wore once and I never wore again – he was a teacher who wielded power in our relationship. I had loved it the day I bought it. An ethic of care emerges out of the work of Nel Noddings, whose work was born out of motherhood (Noddings, 1984). Her ethic of caring is about the individual, reflecting Pinar’s assertion that “only the individual can see the other person’s tears” (Pinar, 2009, p. 34). Her notion of care is between the one and the other. It is an ethic that enlivens the Intimate Dialogue, the other is cared for, the other is beloved. My teacher who called me a terrorist did not take this ethic to his classroom.

The second is that a curriculum-as-planned is imagined and written with a fabricated student before the writer. The student before the curriculum planner is one that does not have a single, subjective voice, but a voice that is an amalgam of data points that the curriculum planner may possess, data points that very likely also reflect the experience of the planner herself. What is her ethnic background? What did she learn in school? What has she come to understand as *what knowledge is of most worth?* More often than not, the answer to this question draws us back to the canon, a set of texts and ideas that someone deemed The Texts we must read in order to be considered rigorous in the field. The canon is an act of crafting and maintaining power, and is, more often than not, reflective of white male ideas. This is

not to say that white men do not have merit in their ideas (and indeed, I have learned from many thoughtful white men, my father not least of all) but the very notion of a canon suggests drawing upon solely these ideas. Any room in the canon made for women and minorities is space made in relation to the works that exist as the fundamental canon. Whatever diverse voices are added to the canon are additions, concessions, and even sensed to be just a bit less legitimate than those of the original canon, the true foundation. In conceiving of the curriculum, we must care for each student, think of each student individually, and provide a space in which they may break free of the canon and participate actively in the question of what knowledge is of most worth in their own lives, fully, in their own identities.

### **7.1.2 Study: The Course We Run is Intimate**

When Pinar (2015) describes study, he describes a way of attending to knowledge, and seeking understanding in the process. The efforts of my study were for reasons of proving to myself that my religious community *does* have a history, kingdoms, and culture. There is a richness in this past that I was unaware of without tuning into my grief of being told that this history did not exist. The study took me to the Alhambra, where I lingered and came to understand that it is not the symbol I hoped it would be, but that it was a path for something better: a deeper understanding of human imperfection. It became more than the proof of my presence and worth in history, it was, instead, a celebration of complexity, the kind that asked of me to embrace that history was just as impossible to call ‘good’ or ‘bad’ as our times now. It was a reality that spoke to my heart.

Rita Irwin (2007) describes



an education of the soul as one that is filled with feeling completely alive, being at one with the universe while experiencing joy, compassion, mindfulness, and a sense of awe for the mystery that abounds. A spiritual curriculum moves beyond the rational and analytic ways of understanding the world and favors intuitive and emotional ways of knowing as we focus our perceptions on building connections, seeking unity, and feeling centered: in other words, being mindful (Irwin, 2007, p. 1401).

I experienced this education of the soul while resting against the cool stone bench of the Alhambra gardens. The soulful education held me in the Alhambra as I engaged in what can only be described as life-writing. I found myself wrestling in a “prayerful act” (Macdonald & Macdonald, 1995) of writing poetry that just flowed from being in the presence of this physical manifestation of the curriculum that was withheld from me. I was both a stranger and at home in this place. Life writing is an act of learning that drew me both within myself and the experience I was engaging in in those moments in the Alhambra gardens, as well as beyond myself with all the others who were there.

What happens in the act of Life Writing? Long held secrets bubble up, betrayals are noted, simple joys giggle forth like teenagers; there’s an unusual attention to the details of material existence and the experience thereof, alongside heightened awareness arising of the absolute intractability of our human interdependence, sabotaging the myth of autonomy (Chambers, 2012, xii – xiii).

My life writing drew forth a kind of poetry that pulled out of me understanding and lessons that had not been on the surface of my understanding of *why* I needed to be in that place at that time. Carl Leggo (2005) describes a “pedagogy of the heart” that uses language not to come to a single truth, or even multiple truths. Instead, he argues, “language is dynamic and energetic, and opens up possibilities for understanding our lives and experiences and relations” (Leggo, 2005, p. 178). In my study of the Alhambra, I wrote:

I know you  
Maybe just a little bit

But I do know  
You love cats and  
Nestle yourself against their  
Cheeks  
When they come close.  
You like to take a break  
Between performances  
From eight to ten thirty  
You need to breathe.  
I know you love the sunlight  
And easily hold it in corners  
Of your heart  
Drawing me to your vulnerabilities  
Those places  
I'd prefer to hide  
If I were you  
I know  
You love the moonlight  
And the way it reminds us  
That you are universal  
But particular to us  
And we are universal  
But particular to you  
Like a flamenco dancer  
You seem to stay still  
But I heard your feet  
Stomp  
When you thought  
No one was looking  
I know that you fill the spaces  
Between a mother's fingers and  
Her daughter's  
When their hands are so tightly  
Clasped  
That they seem to be choking one another  
Or just existing in the fiercest  
Of loves that  
Even if one is gone  
Their palm print  
Remains indented  
For a lifetime  
I know  
That it was you  
Who brought that too familiar palm print  
Pressed it against my heart

And squeezed out drops of my  
Missing her  
I know you like to be evocative  
Drawing out the romance of days gone by  
I know that like  
A Persian carpet  
Your worth comes from  
Each step taken upon your cracked  
Worn  
Body  
I know that  
You draw the city to your shores  
Gently embracing every other building's  
Homage  
Bow  
Namaste  
Sajada.

In my time at the Alhambra it became a living, breathing being for me. But the Alhambra's educative worth for me was both in understanding the building and the place, as well as the people who came to visit it. But most of all, it gave me a new space to grieve the loss of my mother, and the forgotten nature of my cultural history. I spent my days there thinking on these two incomplete journeys: the journey of the Alhambra and my mother's life, both cut short by forces that didn't bother to understand what they were trying to do. In ways that were similar and very different, I longed for the version of history that brought my mother to the Alhambra again with me on this trip, and I longed for the version of history that allowed those who built this incredible place to live out their dreams.

### **7.1.3 Cosmopolitanism: Ghosts Become Embodied**

By attending to my grief, I was drawn into a world of exploration. By entering into an Intimate Dialogue with my beloved other, the grief of a forgotten history, I found myself

discovering the whole world. I was able to unearth that which had been buried, that history that was deemed unnecessary to teach or to understand. As David Geoffrey Smith suggests:

that wisdom traditions have the most to say, and their voice is virtually univocal: To heal the world I must engage in the work of healing myself. To the degree that I heal myself, so will my action in the world be of a healing nature (quoted in Pinar, 2015, p. 232).

While Smith calls this approach of self-healing both a political act as well as an act of “cultural insurrection” (quoted in Pinar 2015 p. 232), Pinar (2015) names it “working from within” (p. 232). The notion that in order to care for others we must first start from within was demonstrated powerfully to me in the process of this Intimate Dialogue.

As Chakrabarty (2003) would argue, “third-world historians feel a need to refer to works in European history; historians of Europe do not feel any need to reciprocate... “They” produce their work in relative ignorance of non-Western histories... This is a gesture, however, that “we” cannot return” (p. 429). In other words, Western hegemony extends well beyond the military and economic powers we see today. It extends to the ownership of history, indeed our thought processes, and the ability to enact binaries of ‘us’ or ‘them,’ leading to a natural linguistic and cultural understanding of ‘West’ or ‘East’: “two distinct cultural wholes, “Eastern culture” and “Western culture,” each identifiable, standing distinctly and separately from each other” (Aoki, 1996, p. 315). This notion of separateness is problematic when striving to develop a curriculum of cosmopolitanism.

Over the course of this Intimate Dialogue, I discovered the world of Al-Andalus and the Brethren of Purity, and though the effort was to prove I indeed did have a kingdom, what I ended up discovering was far more powerful. I discovered myself – living and breathing – in the curriculum I crafted for myself, and in finding myself in the curriculum, I found space

for other ghosts, too, long buried and forgotten. This was an act of active pacifism, a resistance to the violence curriculum had done to me. My grief was, in this case, a similar grief to others who have been maligned by history. While my experience does not relate in most ways to the experience of indigenous peoples, I recognize that my grief of a lost history is quite similar to the grief they, as a beloved other, may also experience.

Indeed, in coming to understand my own grief, it was the grief expressed by African Americans that called to me most clearly. Theirs is, again, an experience I have not known. I do not know what it means to inhabit a black body in this world. But the words of their grief, expressed by people like Toni Morrison and Ta-Nahesi Coates, gave sound to the grief I myself experienced. It enabled me to act as an echo, in my own voice, to my particular experience of this burden.

#### **7.1.4 Cosmopolitanism and Autobiography**

The freedom of a feminist approach to curriculum lies in the celebration of autobiography as a form of study that illuminates cosmopolitanism. Autobiography is a feminist act; “what is most fundamental to our lives as men and women sharing a moment on this planet is the process and experience of reproducing ourselves” (Grumet, 2013, p. 88). Grumet (2013) did not mean only reproduction in a biological sense, although through chimerism we find that reproduction itself is a form of biological cosmopolitanism, transfiguring “the one and the other” (Pinar, 2009, p. 27). Instead, I see her suggestion of self-reproduction as an argument for autobiography in curriculum studies. The stories of women have not been told for millenia, and when they were told, they were told from the tongues of men; it is in autobiography that we may now start to give life to the ghosts of our

history and our curriculum. We again engage in active pacifism to undo the violence of historic, and continued, erasure.

But autobiography is not only about enlivening the ghosts that haunt curriculum, it is about giving credence to the curriculum of cosmopolitanism. In the first way, by offering a new voice to the curriculum, cosmopolitanism becomes enacted in the curriculum, where before it was not. In the second way, feminist approaches to autobiography are necessarily chimera. In describing the curricular work of Leigh Gilmore (1994), Janet Miller (2005) suggests that Gilmore “frames the ‘I’ as situated simultaneously in multiple identity constructions” (p. 50). The ‘I’ of feminist autobiography does not need to emerge from a singular ‘I’ but gives voice to the multiple and complex worlds that exist within each of us. ‘I’ as many forms of existence within the self, is a feminist autobiographical unveiling of cosmopolitanism that creates room for self-estrangement, and a bridge to understanding the other.

### **7.1.5 Dwelling in the Questions**

The curricular connections that emerge from an Intimate Dialogue of the grief of violence beg us to live in the space of questions. Dwelling in the questions has been the lesson of existence these past three years since my mother’s passing. To realize that a definitive answer of the events of her death likely exist in terms of chronology but that answers would still elude me is something I have had to learn to live with. It is a challenge.

From the time of Descartes there has been a sense that the world is knowable and objectively measureable. And yet, we would be fooling ourselves to think that life does not leave us with unanswered questions regularly. I might know if my mother ran from her

attackers that night, but I will never *know* if she thought of me in those last moments. I will never know for certain that she knew I loved her and continue to love her in her absence. It is humbling, to realize that answers cannot be found. It is a different sensation from the feeling of education that always suggested there was a *right* answer out there. At first, I thought those who do have the answers, those who know the truth of what happened that night, were humiliating me in their knowledge, and my ignorance. My sensation of humility and humiliation in the face of knowledge and ignorance reminds me of these words in Aoki's (1993) hands:

What kind of a place is this? A place where there is room for words like humour, human, humus, humility to live together. In such a place, to be humiliated is to be reminded that we are communally ecologic, that the rhythmic measures of living on Earth come forth polyphonically in humour and human and humus and humility.

I have taken this time to come to a place named and, a place of lived tension between this and that. And here, I hope, humiliation is no longer a word that merely sounds negative; in its repositioned sense, humiliation can indeed be a sign of our humanness (p. 300).

My curriculum of grief, then, was ultimately a journey to reading the sign of my humanness. I am imperfect in my grief, and imperfect in all that I do. It is not a humiliation to be imperfect, but an exercise in humility. It, at times, can even be humorous, if we know how to laugh.

### **7.1.6 Cosmopolitanism as Peace**

We live in a culture of binaries, as Aoki would argue (Aoki, 1993a). An existence of either/or in which we are pushed to pick a side - on virtually every matter. As Aoki (1993a) explains "in Western culture, this either/or framework has become dominant, so prevalent that we have tended to adopt it as a reality, forgetting that it has been constituted historically

and culturally” (p.294). In this tradition, then, we are either ‘good’ or ‘bad,’ ‘right’ or wrong.’ Extend this further and we become either secular or spiritual, ‘us’ or ‘them’, ‘I’ or ‘other.’ As we are pushed further and further into entrenched categorizations without possibility for movement, Aoki (1993) warns that we “might unconsciously slip into an oppositional zero-sum game” (p. 294).

In the context of cosmopolitanism, Aoki (1996) demonstrates the experience of binaries very clearly when describing a conversation surrounding the naming of a course at the University of Alberta. The first suggestion was “Western and non-Western Civilizations,” to which Aoki ventured the seemingly obvious binary of “Eastern and non-Eastern Civilizations” (Location 6982). After much discussion, the course title was decided to be “Western and Eastern Civilizations.” Aoki observes that this, ultimately, is not a change from the original “Western and non-Western” title – the binary still exists.

In trying to make a decision of his identity between ‘West’ or ‘East,’ Aoki fails (Aoki, 1979). Aoki dwells on the idea of ‘and’ throughout his works. He is neither Japanese nor Canadian, but Japanese *and* Canadian as a result of his upbringing and multiple schooling experiences. His curriculum-as-lived, therefore, placed him firmly in the ‘*and*’ (Aoki, 1991). Indeed, he describes feeling at times a resonance and at others a sense of exceptionality in his experience of Japan, amongst the ‘black heads’ (Aoki, 1979, p. 332), while he felt similar tensions of comfort and uniqueness in Canada. He is Japanese *and* Canadian. Exceptional and resonant in both cultural spaces.

In the context of cosmopolitanism, this ‘and’ evokes the notion of non-essentialized norms of culture. There is not one answer to the question “what does it mean to be Japanese?” or even, “what does it mean to be Japanese Canadian?” The question of what it



means to be Canadian has been ambiguous at best throughout the country's history (Pinar 2014, Seixas 2009).

In my experience, the notion of *and* seeped into my engagement with others. I extend these questions of “what does it mean to be Japanese” and think about what it means to be *me*. In the days following my mother's passing, it might have been easy to slip into this zero-sum game of good and evil when thinking about the young men who killed my mother. I was careful, when I began to understand what had happened, that these boys should not be labeled as terrorists in my mind. I was careful to see them as boys, as human, as complex. I was careful to understand their actions in the context of Aoki's *and*. In so doing, I engage once again in active pacifism. In choosing, in the face of violence, to not only respond peacefully, but to respond with nonviolence, the pacifist act becomes active. As Butler (2006). argues, grief is not depoliticizing, but indeed “furnishes a sense of political community of a complex order” (p. 12). It was in grief that not only was my commitment to cosmopolitanism ignited, but it was in grief that I came to understand not only the political ramifications of cosmopolitanism, but also the challenge that is cosmopolitanism. It is no longer a theoretical challenge for me, but a daily force that challenges my philosophical endurance in the face of violence both slow and bodily.

## **7.2 Implications**

The implications of this study lie in two primary areas: coming to recognize grief as an experience that offers space for cosmopolitan thinking and establishing the Intimate Dialogue as both a method of research as well as a method of pedagogical engagement. In attending to grief, this research has established grief as a result of violence, broadly

understood. This violence creates a world of ghosts who haunt society, and, in particular, haunt the curriculum as unrepresented caricatures of themselves.

### **7.2.1 Grief**

This dissertation has demonstrated some ways in which grief may be attended to, and the ways this attention may lead to a path of increased cosmopolitan understanding. It has created a space in which teachers, students, and people outside of the school system may take note of their grief in whatever form it reveals itself to them, and transfigure it from an experience of violence alone, to something more powerful. Violence is understood both as bodily violence as well as slow violence, what I have reinterpreted Rob Nixon's (2011) term to refer to the loss of mattering in the world based on cultural queues. In disavowing the right to existence, we craft a world of violence, we enact violence upon those who indeed exist by denying their existence in curriculum. Violence in my education was perpetrated against me in schools where girls made me feel less than for being different from them, particularly in terms of my race and my appearance. Violence in my education was perpetrated against me when my teacher decided that terrorists were "Samira's people" and current affairs would look at a history of violence emerging from Islam. Violence was perpetrated against me when my mother was shot, and I lost my first teacher, and my closest friend.

Grief and violence are intimately linked. With grief, as that which presses heavily against us, violence is the burden of carrying that heaviness. Violence lands intensely upon our bodies, minds, and spirits. Violence creates ghosts that haunt the curriculum. This grieves us. The curriculum determines

whose knowledge and whose potential is encouraged, valued and validated? Whose knowledge is ignored, devalued, relegated to footnotes, and/or erased? Whose life chances and potential is stifled? Whose spirit is broken, mended, and healed? Who lives and who dies? (DePass, 2008, p. 22).

The ghosts that haunt the curriculum are not only the ghosts of ideas long decided no longer relevant, but also the living, breathing students who are receiving this curriculum who are not represented. We learn the canon because somebody deemed this the knowledge that is of most worth, but for many students this is not only an experience of being killed by the curriculum, but an experience of never existing. In determining that someone's history does not matter enough to teach it, in determining that someone has no right to even *exist* in the curriculum, the ghosts are those that are not only told they cannot live in the curriculum, but also, perhaps more importantly, those who are never acknowledged in the first place. These ghosts haunt the curriculum, and it is in breaking the barrier to violence (by making these people invisible in the curriculum) that we make it permissible to enact violence on these ghosts in all areas of life. School life slips out into society, and society slips back into school life. Through engaging with the Intimate Dialogue of grief we engage a form of active pacifism that beings to heal the violence that is perpetrated to create ghosts of the curriculum.

### **7.2.2 Intimate Dialogue**

The first question for teachers, students, and researchers alike is the question of *how* to attend to grief. In this research, the Intimate Dialogue is theorized as an act of engaging the senses to go beyond bearing witness to grief. By listening and echoing back grief in one's own voice, the grief of another can become a burden shared, rather than endured alone. By touching grief, we enter the imaginal realm in which we may connect with one another to

seek to understand the burdens we each carry, and the ways in which we may help one another through life. The Intimate Dialogue was necessarily theorized as fluid because it is dependent on those who are entering into the dialogue. The only first step those entering into a dialogue must take is to take the other as the *beloved* other. Love is the first step to intimacy in this theoretical framework, and it must be the foundation of the dialogue.

By incorporating the notion of the beloved other in the Intimate Dialogue, it becomes an act of cosmopolitanism. It is a process of recognizing that there exists a stranger within as well as beyond the self, and that the self exists beyond the self as well. Entering into a dialogue with this frame of mind makes cosmopolitanism central to the method of research. It requires some imagination, particularly when the other is something as painful to engage as grief. Reframing grief as the beloved other for me transformed the process of engaging grief in an Intimate Dialogue from one of dread to one of ever unfolding wonder and joy over the course of this research.

Using the Intimate Dialogue I attended to three forms of grief that I have personally experienced: the distorted history of Islam, the invisibility of women, and the violence that took my mother. These forms of grief, and my Intimate Dialogue with them, uncovered things that offer powerful elements to the curriculum of cosmopolitanism. The two primary cosmopolitan contributions that attending to grief unfolded in this research included the uncovering of violence and the reanimation of ghosts that haunt the curriculum.

### **7.3 Future Study**

This research was conducted as autobiographical work by the researcher. There are two primary paths through which I envision future study:

1. The first is to take this research to schools and explore the ways grief is attended to in classrooms.
2. The second is to take the conversation of grief to the public domain, beyond formal school structures and understand the ways in which the curriculum of our media and popular culture may both grieve us and give the ghosts of our society new life.

#### **7.4 A Concluding Thought**

Throughout our conversations that drew me closer to my research topic, Mum always used to remind me that I should thank her. To me, it was an obvious act of gratitude I would take for the woman who was my first teacher, and who was literally taking me by the hand through my research process. She wanted acknowledgement for the one or two ideas that emerged out of our conversations, in my mind, even then, to thank her for just that would be insulting. A month before she died, she read one of my pieces of work, in which I described wrestling with the unknown in curriculum studies:

*Your paper is brilliant darling – ABSOLUTELY brilliant...I love it and love it...*

*I am so proud of you – wrestle with x and continue on in your search for the unknown – the journey is beautiful...and I will be here for the meltdowns – these are a part of your metamorphosis :)*

*Love you*

*Mum*

Reading this email from her again in the weeks after she died, I was wounded that her presence during my meltdowns would not be there, as promised. But in each of my meltdowns since, I have had *someone* by my side. Each time. I have never felt alone, and

this, too was a gift from Mum. She created a life, constructed the foundation on which everything I do is built upon. She was my first teacher. Even in death, I have realized, she has taught me one of the most important lessons of my life, and for this, for *all of this*, I credit my mother.

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