Threading Knowledge:
***Sihr* and Divination in Contemporary Kuwait**

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Abstract

English:
Islam in Kuwait, namely**,** state Islam tends to regard the practices of magic and divination, *sihr* in Arabic as illicit. In this light, state Islam has tried to discourage or eliminate such customs through local organizations, Islamic reformers, and government institutions. Despite the efforts of the state, particularly in the view of the difficulty of providing legal traceability to so-called magical or divinatory practices, these have been able to endure through a set of gray areas and legal ambiguities. Predominantly, on the fringes of society, practitioners of traditional magic continue to offer their services to this day, often for considerable sums of money. However, and despite the fact that they are at odds, their way of conceiving and putting into words these practices is nonetheless influenced by State Islam, even if they are not determined by it. Practitioners and their clients thus make themselves able to step outside the framework of this Islam, while being inspired by it. This echoes the content of the practices themselves, insofar as they are part of a perspective in which the notions of free will and fatality take on concrete meaning and allow themselves to be negotiated. In my thesis, I seek to contextualize the notion of agency within this oscillation, while linking it to the socio-economic climate of Kuwaiti society. So, I ask the following question: What form does the hegemonic force of state Islam take on the fringes of society?

French:
L'islam au Koweit, à savoir l'islam d'État, a tendance à considérer les pratiques liées à la magie et la divination, *sihr* en arabe, comme autant de choses illicites. Dans cette optique, cet islam s'est efforcé de décourager ou d'éliminer ce genre de coutumes par le biais d'organisations locales, de l'influence des réformistes, et des institutions du gouvernement. Malgré les efforts de l'État, eut égard notamment à la difficulté de fournir une traçabilité légale aux pratiques dites magiques ou divinatoires, celles-ci ont pu perdurer par un jeu de zones grises et d'ambiguïtés. Aux marges de la société pour une bonne part, les praticiennes de la magie traditionnelle continuent encore aujourd'hui à offrir leurs services, moyennant souvent des sommes considérables. Pour autant, et malgré le fait qu'elles se situent en porte-à-faux, leur manière de concevoir et de mettre en mots ces pratiques n'en est pas moins influencée par l'islam d'État, même si elles ne se laissent pas déterminer par celui-ci. Les praticiennes et leurs clients se rendent ainsi capable de sortir des cadres de cet islam, tout en s'en inspirant. Ceci fait d'ailleurs écho au contenu des pratiques elles-mêmes, dans la mesure où elles s'inscrivent dans une optique où les notions de libre-arbitre et de fatalité prennent un sens concret et se laissent négocier. Dans ma thèse, je cherche à contextualiser la notion d'agentivité (agency) au sein même de cette oscillation, tout en la mettant en lien avec le climat socio-économique de la société Kuwaitienne. Ainsi je pose la question suivante: quelle forme prend la force hégémonique de l'islam d'État aux marges de la société?

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Introduction

In 2012, Dr. Bader al Shabib, the General secretary of the Salafist movement and the supervisor

for the ongoing campaign entitled, the "Kuwaiti Society for Social Progress" (KSSP)

incorporated a new objective into the campaign. The KSSP demanded greater surveillance,

population wide awareness, and harsher punishments of "sorcerers" and "charlatans," exploiting

"weak individuals" for their money, and for cultivating sin against God.[1] Al Shabib uses the term

"*sihr*" (magic) which he defines as sorcery, a means to shape and manipulate reality and

divination (*al-khinana*) as claiming to access knowledge of the unseen (*alghayb*), both of which

are achieved through the use of *jinn* (spiritual entities in Islamic cosmology). [2] Al Shabib

condemned such practices, quoting Surah al Baqarah (verse of the Cow) from the Qur'an,

arguing that God decreed *sihr*, divination, and any interaction with jinn categorically *haram*

(elicit under Islam).[3] The Arabic term "*sihr*" commonly translated as "magic" has been

ambiguously defined both historically and in the present. The ambiguity the word *sihr* traffics is

demonstrated within the Al Shabib's organization, KSSP. For example, Al Shabib's definition of

sihr and divination makes no mention of the practitioner's relation to God. In an interview with

Jassim Al Jaber, a local Sheikh who spoke in support of Al Shabib's campaign offered a

different definition. Al Jaber defined the practice of *sihr* as conducted by practitioners whom he

understood as having "renounced God, the Quran, and more generally, as those who violate

God's command by engaging with demons".[4] A third source claims to derive its definition from

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[1] Taken from http://www.alkuwaityah.com/Article.aspx?id=416217

[2] ibid

[3] ibid

[4] Taken from https://www.al-sharq.com/article/14/09/2018/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D9%88%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%81-%D8%AA%D8%B5%D8%B1%D8%AD-%D9%80-12-%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%B9%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%84%D8%AA%D9%82%D8%AF%D9%8A%D9%85-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B1%D9%82%D9%8A%D8%A9-

Surah Taha of the Quran to textually define *sihr* as a deceptive trick.[5] Under this definition, practitioners with the ability to conduct *sihr* and divination serve to undermine the unique power of God. Despite lacking a comprehensive definition for *sihr*, the campaign under leadership of al Shabib criticized the fact that sorcery, divination, talismans, or any related practice are only rendered illegal under the specific condition that such practices are conducted in exchange for money. This means that while the state's configured Islam recognizes *sihr* and divination as elicit practices, they are persecuted only in its monetized form. This specific condition correlates to the clause under which the practices are categorized, the category of "*nasb o ihtiyal*" (fraud and deception) under article 231 of the Kuwaiti penal code. According to the law, *sihr* and divination are tried as fraudulent or deceptive services that swindle people out of their money. Al Shabib and his organizations petitioned to take this law further, they wanted to prosecute *sihr* and related activities not simply because they were "fraudulent" or "deceptive" acts, but because, in their view, the practices are sacrilegious, a threat to society as well as God. This aims to foreground Al Shabib and his supporters' project to pass a new law categorically criminalizing all such activities, regardless of the presence or absence of money.

This project received considerable support by numerous prominent local figures including Dr. Fahd Marzouq Al-Enezi, a lawyer and local Sheikh Dr. Rashid Al-Alimi, who further argued that the schools, families and mosques must also do their part to address the increasing phenomena of "sorcery" and related activities in Kuwait. The state, through the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs, the Ministry of Information, the Department of Culture, Journalism and Censorship Affairs began increasingly to censor and demonize *sihr* and related

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%D9%84%D9%85%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%B7%D9%86%D9%8A%D9%86

[5] Surah TaHa is translated into verse of the Arabic letter Ta and Ha. It is unknown what these letters signify. Interestingly, the titles of the Qur'anic verses are later addition to the scriptural text and reflect a word or a concept associated later with a given verse and adopted as its title (Zwettler 1991: 211-33).

activities.[6] For example, an Arabic television program that included the themes of *sihr* and jinn proscribed from a local broadcasting channel, Kuwait Television (KTV) (Hamada 2015). Books referring to witches, magic or sorcery have also been prohibited.[7] However, the proposal for a specific law criminalizing *sihr* was rejected on the grounds that there are already other laws in place that effectively punishes such acts.[8] The state further averred that *sihr* and divination are distinct from other crimes: they are not material and thus pose evidentiary difficulties.

What emerges from these events and debates in local discussions is the difficulty of forming a conclusive definition of what "*sihr*" and "divination" constitute. and the problem of law and evidence. In other words, *sihr* and divination cannot be precisely defined nor categorized. Firstly, the terms and practices pertaining to both *sihr* and divination are imbued with ambiguity, and an "otherworldliness" resistant to earthly materialization, and therefore, to legal sanction. Secondly, it is not that *sihr* and divination do not entail material aspects, al Shabib named talismans as one example, but the issue is that the various materials are not exclusive to the practices of *sihr* and divination, and therefore are insufficient as evidence. In other words,

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[6] "Awqaf" is the plural form of "waqf" often translated to "Islamic trust" or a "pious foundation." A waqf is an unincorporated trust established under Islamic law by a living man or woman for the provision of a designated social service in perpetuity. Its activities are financed by revenue-bearing assets that have been rendered for- ever inalienable" (Quran 2001:842).

[7] In fact, Kuwait as banned a total of 4,390 books in the past six years on ethical grounds. The ministry of Information has banned everything from the Harry Potter novels to Machiavelli's "The Prince". Furthermore, any title with the words "devil" or sectarian ideology is prohibited. Conversely, books containing sermons by Ali bin Abi Taleb (the prophet's cousin) are also banned "under the claim that they transgress the sacred". Taken from https://www.al-fanarmedia.org/2018/09/book-banning-in-kuwait-whatever-next/ and https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/calls-protest-kuwait-banned-book-list-reveals-extent-censorship accessed on September 13, 2019. Legal claims taken from https://www.dc4mf.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/press_law_kuwait.pdf accessed on September 12, 2019. The law was promulgated in 2006, and implementation started soon thereafter, about four years before the Arab spring in 2010.

[8] Law 16 under the penal code dictates that foreigners who have been convicted of a felony "then the judge must order his deportation once his sentence is served". Thus, the punishment originally prescribed is deportation rather than execution, which is only applicable to foreigners. Taken from http://gulfmigration.org/law-no-16-of-1960-promulgating-the-penal-code-2/ accessed on September 13, 2019. Kuwaiti citizens are subject to incarceration, and removal from public office and political enfranchisement (run for political office and voting) under articles 68, 69, 70 and 71. Taken from http://www.gcc-legal.org/LawAsPDF.aspx?opt&country=1&LawID=4204 accessed on September 13, 2019.

the materials are not definitive which render it difficult to substantiate *sihr* and related activities. To the distress of the KSSP, *sihr* and related activities remain effectively prohibited and punishable only when practiced in exchange for money, leaving non-monetized practices legally permissible.

My interest here is not the legal issues of the KSSP or with how state institutions and state practices penalize *sihr* and divination. Instead, I seek to understand what these practices mean and what they do. In particular, I analyze these practices in relation to the dynamic socio-cultural milieu within which they are constituted and within which they operate. One factor we can deduce from the socio-cultural milieu is that the legal ambiguity creates vital room for maneuvering. Through the lens of ambiguities, indefinite evidence and gaps between forms of knowledge and knowledge and practice, I investigate how Kuwaiti citizens create alternative Islamic discourses and practices that interweave with rather than against state Islam. In this way, I show how the project of state regulation inadvertently produces its own failures.

Against the backdrop of the hegemonic force of Islamic reform movements, this project is a window into questions of agency, freedom, and constraint. To what extent can people shape their realities and themselves? To what extent is the hegemonic order totalizing? Who participates in these practices? For what purposes?

Historical Context

The law's premise is undergirded by the assumption that *sihr* and divination are antithetical to the Islamic tradition and unequivocally immoral. In order to understand how these practices came to be located outside the folds of Islam in Kuwait, it is necessary to give a brief historical context of the relationship between *sihr* and divination in Islam. After which, I outline the emergence and consolidation of state Islam in Kuwait, and how it functions to demonize and

simultaneously create space for *sihr* and divination practices. Specifically, I outline state

institutions through which state Islamic discourses and practices are disciplined and made

recognizable, and thus, naturalized.

The term the state and KSSP use for divination is "*al-khinana"*, a pre-Islamic term that

derives from the noun "*kahin*". In the pre-Islamic period, the *kahin* was a diviner, or a poet, as

much overlap existed between the two (Taminain 2001:91; Moreman 2016). Both the diviner and

the poet were the spiritual and/or the political leaders of their own communities. In particular, the

soothsayer was the advisor to his own community; he was consulted on all daily matters such as

marriages, births, trade, and dream interpretation as well as on major events including inter- or

intra-tribal wars and disputes (Taminian 2001:91). The *kahin* was entrusted with guarding

sanctuaries, transmitting oracles, offering sacrifices to the gods and interpreting signs of

divination (al-Zein 1994:128). He, for they were usually men, also functioned as the *hakam*

(arbitrator) whose opinion was sought in legal disputes as well as in blood feuds (Taminian

2001:104). The poet and the soothsayer alike had access to privileged jinn-inspired knowledge,

inaccessible to others. The jinn were understood to be invisible, rational entities that had the

ability to impact human life in both positive and negative ways. Jinn were known to inspire, heal,

and aid individuals in their everyday life, while others were perceived as ambiguous, malicious

or tricksters (El-Zein 2017:12; Moreman 2016). They were known to traverse both the natural

and supernatural world, and thus, their in-between essence fit the tasks they perform as mediators

between the supernatural and the natural realms (Taminian 2001:110). In this context, the

supernatural is defined as the "locus of the sacred and the Truth" which is hidden from human

sight, that prophets and poets eagerly attempt to acquire (Taminian 2001:106)

The *kahin* communicated their prophecies in a rhymed prose (*saja'*) believed to be the first poetic language.[9] The language they used was 'Arabiyya, which, according to Zwettler, was a privileged linguistic variety of Arabic accessible only to poets and soothsayers who comprised the elite of Arabian society (1978:101 cited in Taminian 2001:91). This 'Arabiyya later became the language of the Qur'an (2001: 101). Due to the possible slippage between the Prophet and the *kahin*, the Qur'an takes pains to differentiate the prophet Muhammad's role as a messenger of Allah from that of the *kahin*, who receives messages from jinn, or the divinely inspired poet (*sha'ir*) (Gort 1992; Moreman 2016; Taminian 2001). The Islamic consensus is that the prophet does not receive his message from a jinni (singular form of jinn), but from Allah through the angel Gabriel (Gort 1992). Thus, one way the distinction between pre-Islamic and Islamic traditions was marked was through the different traditions of revelation.

The rise of Islam distinguished the prophet from the *Kahin* but did not eliminate the figure of the jinn. The Qur'an juxtaposes humans and jinn, emphasizing their commonalities and differences. Humans are made out of clay, and jinn are made out of fire, and yet both creations are understood to be rational beings imbued with free-will, and *taklif* (religious responsibility) (El-Zein 2017).[10] This refers to their knowledge of the revealed Holy Law for it is believed both species will be accounted for their deeds on the Day of Judgment (El-Zein 2017). Moreover, the Qur'an names both jinn and humans as possible sources of corruption, especially underscored in *Surah al Nas*.[11]

Although the Qur'an maintained the ambiguous position of the jinn, many scholars

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[9] The poetic production of jinn is discussed in Na'im a (1961), 'Abd al-Rahim (1990), and El-Zein (1994).

[10] Aspects of the jinn's traits are defined in over 23 Qur'anic verses and in numerous sayings of the Prophet. The Islamic discourse on spiritual entities in general and jinn in particular is documented in al-Suyuti (1989), al-Shibli (1988), and Adham (1993).

[11] The Surah states: 'I take refuge with the Lord of Mankind, the King of Mankind, the God of Mankind, from the evil of the slinking whisperer who whispers into the hearts of mankind—[from] among jinn and [from] among Men." The verse recited bestows one with protection from both jinn *and* men.

emphasize that after the advent of Islam, Muslim jurists discredited the value of messages

transmitted by seers and condemn any association with jinn (Eneborg 2013; El Zein 2017;

Günther & Pielow 2019; Haggog 2019). This perspective ignores the nuances and debates

pertaining to the occult throughout Islamic history. For example, the tenth century scholar, Ibn

al-Nadim, and the medieval scholar Ibn Khaldun engaged in various dialogues related to the

plausibility of augury, *sihr* and communication with jinn and made distinctions between licit and

illicit magic in Islam (Michael Dols 2004 cited in; Savage-Smith 2017:521).[12] Yasmeen al Saleh

further adds this point, she investigates a theory of the occult in the medieval primary sources of

the Neo-platonic tenth century of Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ and al-Bunī (d.1225) and concludes that: the

use of magical talismans were generally categorized as science ('*ilm*); that there is often a

relationship between the occult and devotion; while acknowledging a tension between occult

practices and discourses and the theologians that condoned practices of Islamic magic. (2014).[13]

Michael Dols' analysis of Islamic medicine further contributes two important points that I take

into consideration, first, is that magic for Muslims is often understood as what he calls

"supercharged prayer," and is sanctioned by the authority of countless Hadiths attributed to the

Prophet (2017:88). In other words, in some Muslims' perspective, religion and certain forms of

magic were always indistinguishable. Dols' second point interprets al Saleh's observation of

tensions between Islamic magic and Islamic theologians, but he interprets this tension through

the analytical lens of power. Dols argues that *sihr* is considered a taboo subject because it

encroached upon the preserve of established religion and provided an alternative authority,

namely the magician (2004: 89). This view has been nuanced, in that, for many Muslims, magic

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[12] In Edgar Walter Francis IV doctoral dissertation he investigates al-Bunī 's *Shams al-maʿārif* to argue that in this work magic was constituted by the Qur'an (2005).

[13] For example, in the writings of Ibn Qayyim alJawziyya (d. 1349), a Mamluk Hanbali theologian who tried to purify Islam of the occult (al Saleh 2014).

as it was practiced was an established religion, or, at least, the only one they knew (Dols

2004:87& 49).[14] For the purposes of this thesis, the role of established religion, or more

specifically, the hegemonic force of orthodox Islam becomes imperative. The hegemonic force

of orthodox Islam can be rooted in several Islamic reform movements that Kuwait has

experienced. Although there have been several reform movements, here I narrow my focus on

the Salafi doctrine stemming from Saudi Arabia, a doctrine that seeks to delineate the parameters

of Islam proper.[15] To put it another way, Salafis seek to aggressively "deculturalize Islam" (Roy

2004) by cleansing it from local cultural elements.

For Salafis, the Qur'an and Sunna (recorded sayings and doings of the prophet) are read

literally and outline rules that are supposed to govern every aspect of human belief and behavior

(Islam as a comprehensive way of life) (Wiktorowicz 2006; Ostebo 2014). As a result, every act

is an act of worship if it is in accordance with Islamic law. Deviant behaviors, on the other hand,

indicate submission to something other than God (Wiktorowicz 2006; Ostebo 2014). For

example, Salafis ban the practice of praying to important religious figures as intercessors with

God (a practice known as *tawassuf*) because it is seen as worshipping something other than God.

In a widely cited hadith (recorded saying or tradition), the Prophet revealed to Muslims that,

"[T]his Ummah [Muslim community] will divide into seventy-three sects all of which except one

will go to Hell and they are those who are upon what I and my Companions are upon" (Zaynoo

1996:3; Hilai 1999:39-40; Wiktorowicz 2006:209). The Salafis believe they are this saved sect

(*firqa al-najiyya*) and that they will receive salvation on the day of judgment (Wiktorowicz

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[14] Francis Peters in his article 'Hermes and Harran: The Roots of Arabic-Islamic Occultism' allows the reader to become aware of the syncretic nature of occult beliefs and practices in the early Islamic world. Although many Arabs continued to live in rural environs, relatively isolated from the great urban civilizations, maintaining folk-beliefs and practices inherited from their forefathers (2005).

[15] It should be notes than even the Salafi groups in Kuwait are fragmented, but they nevertheless share overarching theological doctrines (Pall 2017).

2006). This belief is often cited as a justification for their aggressive practice of denouncing "deviating" forms of Islam from the one true path. As noted by John Bowen (1999), such processes of reform would be informed and directed by the particularities of the locality, and in Saudi Arabia came to focus much on pilgrimages to the shrines, veneration of Muslim saints, celebrations of mawlid al-Nabi (the Prophet's birthday), and rituals performed at graveyards. Like grave visitations, and rituals, *sihr*, divination and any association with jinn were definitively demonized in Kuwait (Wiktorowicz 2006; Ostebo 2014).

The Kuwaiti Context

Salafism gained a foothold in Kuwait in the late 1960s (Pall 2014). In the beginning Salafis spread their message and their purging of "cultural" elements out of Islam, including *sihr*, divination and jinn by organizing religious lessons in mosques or using traditional Kuwaiti gatherings, or *diwaniyas*, as spaces for proselytization.[16] Over the course of the next ten years Salafism gained a considerable base of followers; by the end of the 1970s it had become a mass movement. Three main factors contributed to its development:

The first was the decline of Arab nationalism and the left, and the subsequent Islamic revival throughout the Middle East. In Kuwait, as in other Arab countries, the various Arab nationalist and Marxist movements enjoyed overwhelming popularity until the late 1960s. However, after the catastrophic defeat of the Arab armies in the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, the reputations of the Arab nationalist and Marxist movements rapidly declined, and the vacuum was filled by an increase in religiosity and the ascendance of Islamic movements (Pall 2014:22).[17] The main beneficiary of this process was the Muslim Brotherhood, which by the early 1980s

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[16] A *diwaniya* is a traditional culture of Kuwaitis that literally means "To gather together, or a place of assembly, parlour, Hall or lounge ". It originates from Arabic word "*diwan*" which means the place where the Amir meets his subjects and listens to their concerns (Altaher 2014:60).

[17] Some examples of such movements include Harakat Al-Ishtirakiyeen Al-'Arab (Arab Socialist Party), Al-Hizb Al-Shuyu'i Al-'Arabi (Arab Communist party), and al-Baʿth (Arab Renaissance Socialist party).

became the strongest political force in Kuwait (Utvik 2014; Pall 2014). Salafis were also able to take advantage of the religious upheaval because they already controlled several mosques and had direct access to young people who had recently turned to religion.

The second factor is the geopolitical shifts in the region that occurred in the aftermath of the Iranian Revolution and boosted the stature of the Salafis. The Iranian Revolution of 1979 was perceived as posing a severe threat to Kuwait, the Kuwaiti government did not want the revolution to spread to the Shi'a communities in the Gulf (Bianco 2020; Dazi-Heni 2015; Albloshi 2016). In addition, the fact that Islamists were able to come to power and establish a regime based on sharia law in Iran (despite the fact that they were Shia) gave the Muslim Brotherhood new confidence that their project could also be implemented in countries with Sunni majorities (Pall 2014; Olav Utvik 2014). The Kuwaiti ruling family was frightened by the prospect of being overthrown by the Islamists. Therefore, to divide the Sunnis, the state began supporting the Salafi movement against the Muslim Brothers (Wiktorowicz 2006; Pall 2014).

The third factor was the Salafi movement's ability to penetrate Kuwait's economic elite. By the late 1970s, many scions of influential merchant families had become followers of Salafism (Olav Utvik 2014; Pall 2017). This enabled the movement to gain a presence in the financial and trading sector, thereby receiving additional funding. Since the merchants were interested in social and political issues, the voices that became stronger in the Salafi movement were those that were keen to see religious rulings implemented in public life. This was probably one of the reasons that Salafism in Kuwait evolved in a unique way and became active in the country's political life at a time when Salafis elsewhere were mostly preoccupied with personal beliefs and religious practice.

By the early 1980s, the Salafi movement in Kuwait had achieved an unprecedented level of organizational development (Pall 2017:5). Through state institutions, state Islam embedded in Salafi tenets became naturalized establishing an ostensibly homogenous "pious order," (Spadola 2013) an assemblage circumscribing "legitimate" Islam. [18] Islamic movements, and primarily, the Salafi movement created various Islamic organizations, colleges, Islamic banking, recordings, pamphlets, and television broadcasting on correct Islamic interpretation, women's groups, labour unions, teacher's associations, food co-ops, and voluntary associations (Moqatei 1989; Al Mughni 2010; Ramazani 1985; Ahmed 2007). It was during this time, that the state produced the largest encyclopedia of Islamic Jurisprudence in which *sihr*, divination, and jinn activities were explicitly prohibited.[19] The Encyclopedia was authored and published in the Arabic language by the Kuwait Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs.[20]

The Salafis' movement has been conceptualized as a vast educational network. The school then becomes the crucial location in which Islamic tenets were and are disseminated interwoven with nationalistic undertones. A mandatory Islamic education was put into place, from primary to secondary school in which teachers must use a ministry-produced textbook, where a construct of what it means to be "Muslim" is streamlined and merged with what it means to be Kuwaiti (Doumato 2007; Nakib 2015). Islamic interpretation is presented as

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[18] This "pious order" has traversed local border and has been mass produced and exported to neighboring regions, and South Asia (Ahmed 2017; Spadola 2013 Pall 2017).

[19] The Encyclopedia project was officially initiated in 1965 and a wide number of Islamic scholars contributed through its completion in 2005 (in approximately 40 years). The Encyclopedia of Islamic Jurisprudence (*Mausua Fiqhiya Kuwaitiya)* was prepared in alphabetical order and published in 45 volumes reaching about 17,650 pages. It encompasses the Fiqh (Islamic Jurisprudence) of all four major Islamic schools of thought. It has been translated into Urdu, and Farsi and is subject to wide circulation. http://islam.gov.kw/Pages/en/PublicationDetails.aspx?id=12

[20] "*Awqaf*" is the plural form of "*waqf*" is mortmain property often translated to "Islamic trust" or a "pious foundation." A *waqf* is an unincorporated trust established under Islamic law by a living man or woman for the provision of a designated social service in perpetuity. Its activities are financed by revenue-bearing assets that have been rendered for- ever inalienable" (Kuran 2001:842).

"generic Islam" "finished" "unchanged" and not open debate (Doumato 2007: Nakib 2015:12).[21]

In short, the school became the locus of a Kuwaiti-Muslim making. From this, we can deduce

that Salafi Islam is inextricably tied to the "coercive powers of the state" (Spadola 2013:7) that

recursively shape citizens into a particular form of Muslims through encounters with the state

and state regulated institutions. Since the 1980s, Salafi Islam has become a hegemonic force, the

authority in defining the boundaries of state Islam. Al Shabib, and his supporters' protests

reiterate the Salafi position, placing *sihr* and divination outside Islamic parameters.

Repetition & Resignification

Although Salafi Islam has become a hegemonic force in Kuwait, it exists alongside other sects

namely, Shi'a Islam. Shi'a Muslims in Kuwait comprise one-third of the Kuwaiti population and

have also established an Islamic movement called the Cultural and Social Society distinct from

the Sunni Salafi movement (Ahmad 2017; Alhabib 2010). The Shi'a's movement was articulated

in relation to the region's politics of belonging and in the grammar of Islamic reform. Thus,

although Kuwait's Islamic movements are somewhat doctrinally diverse, they share a common

goal: promoting Islamic piety and social reform within a nationalist framework (Ahmad 2017).

Shi'a and Sunni social reform and Islamic piety converge on the issue *sihr*, divination and jinn

practices, for both sects in Kuwait view the practices as illicit (*haram*). In this way, state

discourses and practices in the form of state institutions, media, the Kuwaiti fashioned

Encyclopedia of Islamic Jurisprudence (*Mausua Fiqhiya Kuwaitiya)* and Kuwaiti law have

produced certain discourses, and normative dispositions that come to be shared by Kuwaiti

Muslims regardless of their sect.

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[21] Mandana Limbert argues that although these images can be homogenizing and exclusionary, they are "official wish-images" of what the state wishes to convey to their young citizens (2007:21).

The state's sanctioned discourses and practices pertaining to *sihr*, divination and jinn carried out through multiple registers enables forms of piety—the licit, and the illicit to become categorized and standardized. Thus, the state's sanctioned discourses and practices accrue power by virtue of their repetition (Spadola 2013:7). And yet, divination, *sihr*, and jinn practices persist among self-identifying Muslims. How can we understand the persistence of divination, *sihr* and jinn practices against the norms that sanction against it? I draw on the work of Emilio Spadola and Attiya Ahmad to help articulate the extent to which Muslims reconfigure their divination, *sihr* and jinn practices in relation to state Islam norms within the everyday. In Spadola's ethnography, *The calls of Islam* (2013), he argues that different rituals and practices in Morocco represent calls to Islam that compete for legitimacy in a local and national context. Spadola examines the tensions between older local traditions of saint veneration, and the management of spirit possession, and Quranic based Salafi exorcism deployed by the state. Each ritual form produces a different call to Islam through repetition. Spadola's work offers an astute analysis of the ways divergent calls to Islam are disseminated, made audible and answered (or not). I build on Spadola's work, while distinguishing my approach through attention to how ostensibly contradictory calls are subject to convergence, and to how Muslim's weave local and state discourses of to Islam together in a particular manner and how this manner is shaped.

In Ahmad's book, *Everyday Conversions* (2017) she explores why domestic migrant workers in the Persian Gulf convert to Islam. She argues that conversion to Islam becomes one form of belonging and relating to employers, with whom they develop kin-like ties over time. Conversion itself becomes an ongoing process rather than a radical break with pre-existing religious affiliations. Ahmad draws on Talal Asad, to show how Muslim converts negotiate interactions between different religious traditions through the cultivation and enactment of

Islamic ethics within the everyday. These enactments do not necessarily eliminate pre-existing discursive traditions, but instead rework them (2017). Ahmed's account is generative to think with, as she attends to the ways in which normative Islam is processually reconfigured through pre-existing discursive tradition within the everyday. Although, my account does not entail two different discursive traditions (Islam and Christianity), but instead pertains to a normative Islam that is reconfigured with alternative Islamic discourses and practices. Furthermore, in my account, I want to investigate the extent to which processual reconfiguration of Islamic discourses and practices are undertaken by the State itself. Another point of deviation is that while Ahmed emphasizes Muslim forms of belonging, my interlocutors emphasize positions of distinction, they are Muslim, but their position is one of exceptionality via their privileged supernatural calling to *sihr*, divination, communication with jinn, and other related practices.

Religious Practices, Monetary Exchanges

Practicing *sihr* and divination in exchange for money is both a religious practice and an economic activity. Therefore, seeking to explicate *sihr* and divination practices must be contextualized in relation to both Islamic and the state's economic discourses and practices, for the two converge structurally through the state, and in *sihr* practices. Kuwait is often glorified as an oil rich country which boasts a generous welfare provisions for citizens and a national population where homelessness and poverty by the standards of the West does not exist (Crystal 1993). Against this backdrop, practitioners charge high prices in relation to the average Kuwaiti salary for divination and *sihr* practices.[22] In this context, I reject simple explanations that point to the exploitation of clients, or greed, precisely because divination and *sihr* practitioners are also

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[22] Al-Qabas Kuwaiti newspaper reports that the average pay for a Kuwaiti government employee was 827 dinars per month in 2007–2008, which amounts to something on the order of $36,000 annually. This is total pay, including base salary and various supplements and allowances. Mubarak al-Abd al-Hadi, al-Qabas, March 14, 2008. While sihr prices range from anywhere between 300 to 8000 dinars.

clients that pay the same prices they charge other clients. Instead, this section probes an important aspect necessarily for understanding *sihr* and divination in modern day Kuwait, the logic behind the commodification of *sihr* through the perspective of the practitioner's religiosity. In doing so, I seek to explicate the emergence of a distinctive Kuwaiti-Islamic economic philosophy through the prism of the commodification of *sihr* and divination.

The Imagination

Lucine Taminain avers that divination is related to inspiration, to illustrate this relationship, she employs the Arabic verb "*nafatha*, to breathe or puff out" (2001:91). Jinn are believed to "breathe" their messages into the souls or the hearts of their recipients. In the Prophet's saying: "The Holy spirit *nafatha* (breathed) into my soul," where *nafatha* signifies prophecy (2001:91). Incantatory breath, *al-nafath*, *fi al-'uqad,* refers to the soothsayers' chanting of magical utterances on knots to cast or annul a spell; *al-naffathatf i al- 'uqad* are female soothsayers who recite their prophecy and magic while blowing upon knots, a practice condemned in the Qur'anic verse Surah al Falaq (The Dawn) (2001:92).[23] From this, we can deduce that traditions of revelation stem from the idea that revelations come from outside of the individual, they are "breathed" into the individual from "Elsewhere" (Mittermaier 2011). In Amira Mittermaier's book, *Dreams that Matter* (2011) she complicates the concept of self-cultivation through divinely inspired dreams, or dream-visitations. She demonstrates how dream-visitations are understood to be divine intervention from Elsewhere, in which subjects are neither "acting within nor on acting against but on being acted upon" (2011:10). For Mittermaier, dreams become a vehicle that impels the individual into a wider world of meaning and lived experience. Drawing

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[23] The belief in the power of knots to cure or to curse was dominant in pre-Islamic Arabia. Female sorcerer would practice tying and untying knots while blowing on them and chanting charms (Johnstone 1976: 79 cited in Taminian 2001:92; El-Zein 2017:168)

on Mittermaier and Taminain, I define dream-visitations, jinn encounters and divination practices as "technologies of the imagination" (Malinowski 1935; Sneeth et al 2009; Bear 2015), a mode of knowledge production "breathed" into the diviner from "Elsewhere." I seek to analyze the implications of these technologies as situated within the participants wider social context.

Technologies are external machineries that enable individuals to act upon themselves. Technologies of the imagination are defined as material practices and experiential processes through which particular imaginings are generated. Like Mittermaier, the imagination here does not relate to the realm of fantasy confined to the mind, but as imbued with cognitive power (gaining knowledge and understanding), and thus, the ability to critically shape social reality and the participants themselves. While Benedict Anderson does not explicitly use the term "technologies of the imagination" he conceptualizes the nation as an "imagined community" generated from the mass production and dissemination of print media. That is to say, he analyzes how material practices become the basis of the imagination that fold a world onto itself. Anderson makes another important point I wish to draw on, he argues that "communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined" (1983:6). There are many instances in Kuwait wherein *sihr* and divination are understood to be false or disingenuous, however, there is a second consideration I want to explore, the style of imagining, that is, the idiosyncratic factors that practitioners include and exclude to imagine their divine insights. Some questions that I probe include: what are the different styles of imaging, and to what extent are they in relation to (or expressions of) state Islam?

Sihr as a technology of the imagination is distinguished from divination and dreams because it is not a mode of knowledge production, but understood to be a mode of transformation, and thus, based on action. Another key difference is the way language works in

both. Divination and dreams are constituted by symbols to be interpreted and communicated in everyday language to the client. In contrast, incantatory breath is perceived to be constituted by the repetitive recitation of holy words. To explicate the potency of language, I draw on the work of Katherine Lemons. In, *Divorcing Tradition* (2019), Lemons analyzes healing practices carried out by a mufti, an Islamic Jurist in the context of India. She explains that the mufti writes talismans (*ta'wiz*) and conducts a number of other healing practices for petitioners with social and economic complaints. Lemons argues that the mufti produces speech acts "which take the form of metaphors—produce the relations through which God's power travels" (2019:171). The circulation of God's holy words that "work through the body of the mufti, his enunciations and his breath, and on the bodies of people experiencing trouble as they are ingested through breath, food, drink, or bodily contact" (2019:171). Efficacy is achieved not solely because the use of God's holy words, but by their "circulation and incorporation into other bodies by ingestion, inhalation, audition, and proximity" (2019: 189). Thinking through Lemons work, I define *sihr* as speech acts, holy performative utterances that are circulated and incorporated into the bodies (or materials) the speech acts affect.

Thesis Organization

This thesis is divided into three separate but interconnected chapters. In the first chapter, I examine divination practices that I define as distinct from but corresponding to *sihr*. Where divination is a practice of knowledge production, *sihr* is a facilitator of action. This chapter is split into three sections that give an account of divination through multiple entry points. In the first section, I introduce my primary interlocutor, a Kuwaiti *sihr* and divination practitioner called Mosa and recount her "call" to Islam as situated within her socio-economic position. I narrate Mosa's story through her own understanding of her experiences and practices. The next

section focuses on "*aql*" the mechanism undergirding Mosa's divination practice, while the final section focuses on the practices themselves. I show how Mosa reiterates *sihr* and divination by and through state Islamic discourses and practices, thereby both transcending norms and simultaneously adhering to them.

In the second chapter I show that in the Kuwaiti context, *sihr* is used to fulfill desires that are particular to the cultural and socio-economic and tribal landscape (kinship structures organized through patrilineal lineage) of Kuwait such as employment, or bureaucratic expedience where the necessity of *wasta* prevails. *Wasta* is a hierarchically structured mode of intercession based on connections for accessing state resources, while other desires cut through culture, class and time, such as marriage. In doing so, I draw on Katherine Lemons to argue that *sihr* operates through the circulation of powerful words that produce effects by "hailing bodies of jinn, neighbors, husbands" (2019: 182). I end the chapter with addressing the monetary aspects of *sihr*, and the ethical ambiguity that it creates. It is a contradiction I examine more deeply in the last chapter.

In the final chapter, I probe the contradictions between practice and discourse through analyzing the intersection of *sihr* and economics. I draw on Mathew Erie's study on the "customization of *sadaqah*" (alms giving), in which he argues that *sadaqah* manifests as a practice based on multiple value systems (2016:317) in order to show how the multiple value systems undergirding the commodification of *sihr* practices interact and enfold one another.

Methodology

My thesis is based on ethnographic data collected during just over three months of fieldwork in Kuwait, from May 23, 2016, until September 4, 2016. I employed three methods to gather the majority of material: participant observation; semi-structured interviews; and structured

interviews. I have employed these methods because they provide access to various perspectives, details and narratives. I have included biographical information, personal reflection, life stories, everyday descriptions and experiences as well as my own empirical observations. I have attempted to relate all of my interpretations through the perspective of the participants and practitioners, as well as contextualizing them through political, social and economic factors.

During my fieldwork, I lived with two different *sihr* practitioners, the first for six weeks, and the second for two and a half weeks. The two women I lived with introduced me to their peers and clients, who agreed to speak with me, and consented to my presence and observations. My positionality, as someone from a higher socio-economic sphere than my interlocuters (although not all, as in the case of some clients), created a gap that I bridged in ways through shared cultural knowledge and background which served to establish familiarity. As the main practitioner I lived with was from an Iranian background and she felt an affinity with me since my mother is also from an Iranian background. Shared cultural knowledge was both an asset and an obstacle. I experienced what Galina Lindquist describes as "tacit knowledge" (2005) in which native anthropologists are confronted with interlocuters from the same, or similar cultural background who often assume that the native anthropologist already knows the answer to the seemingly obvious questions (i.e. what is *sihr*?), and thus, do not provide explicit answers. And, while I times, I did know the answer to the questions in a general sense, I did not know how each practitioner or client would answer. For example, when I asked a client what divination was, she responded "you lived in Canada for a few years and now you forgot?" or, after asking what *sihr* was to another practitioner, "*sihr* is *sihr*, are you telling me Canadians don't have *sihr?*" I navigated these problems by explaining that my teachers had absolutely no knowledge of these practices and they were very interested, and that I had never conducted them and so I was poorly

suited to explain without their help. Other times, I would re-ask the same question in different ways, during different moments, sometimes pointing to the actual practices itself, or to other concrete examples. Throughout my fieldwork, I was never a client of their practices, nor did the practitioners ever ask if I wanted *sihr* or divination. I had explained that I wanted to learn about their practices and their lives, and they indulged me, for reasons that come through more tangibly through the ethnographic narratives I recount in the first chapter. Lastly, to avoid "officializing discourses" (Bourdieu 1980), I abstained from explicitly asking about state discourses demonizing *sihr*, and when I do, it is an elaboration of the interlocutor's statement. I have attempted to confine my analysis of state Islamic discourses to the extent that it is made visible through my interlocuters discourses and practices.

In order to gain consent from the client, the practitioners I lived with informed their clients of my presence as an assistant/researcher who wanted to learn about divination and *sihr* prior to their session. The practitioners assured the clients that everything would remain anonymous, and that if they felt uncomfortable with the idea of my presence, I would not be present when they arrived. The practitioners also told their clients my name prior to consent, because I am Kuwaiti, and I grew up in Kuwait, coupled with the fact that Kuwait has a small population, we [the practitioners and I] both felt horrified at the idea of an old classmate of mine arriving with shock or potential embarrassment upon seeing me. There were several clients that requested I not be present for their session, but they did not mention why. Mosa asked me not to ask any question or more generally speak during the session, unless the client spoke to me, but I was free to converse before or after the sessions. Due to the performative and intersubjective nature of divination and *sihr* sessions, my presence disrupted the dynamic in ways that I could not compare with the absence of my presence. As such, the sessions I have included are never

the client's first session, when the client was sometimes (although not always) more hesitant to react and to reveal their thoughts, emotions, concerns and desires. The sessions I have included, or discussions about clients are with clients I formed friendships with over the course of 14 weeks.

Living with two of my interlocutors exposed me to various elements of their lives, but the duration of six weeks and two and a half weeks is also an insufficient period of time to thoroughly analyze the dynamic and complex lives of people. Furthermore, my study is largely focused on the life of one practitioner, which provides a form to understand experience over time and across a life. I chose to confine this study to the *sihr* practitioners, as exceptions and the ex-centric as a means of investigating the extent to which collective conditions or group dynamics are adhered to or are rejected by the margins. Or, more accurately, what form do collective representations take in the margins of society?

I focused on women, as the Kuwaiti cultural and religious landscape promotes segregation of men and women, and thus, my access was generally limited to women. This does not mean that men do not engage in such practices, for they do, I was simply not permitted access. Thus, I avoided centering discussions on *sihr* as a gendered practice because that would obfuscate the more complex reality of *sihr* and divination practices. I chose to focus specifically on Kuwaiti women, as to reduce the possibility of any legal risk and conflict that may arise. Although many foreigners residing in Kuwait practice *sihr* and divination, they are significantly more vulnerable to state discipline and punishment if discovered. Due to these potential risks, I have changed the names of all my interlocutors, and concealed any details they did not want me to share. For example, I abstain from sharing tribal names, regions of origin etc.

There are many internal conflicts, dialogues and contestations of meaning around *sihr*, and divination amongst and between practitioners, participants and Kuwaiti society at large. As such, this study offers a particular window into the conceptions of *sihr* and divination in a context where copious interruptions, reconfigurations and resignifications are possible, but also specific in their reformulations.

Chapter One
<u>Resignified Piety</u>

It was mid-May when I moved into Mosa's home, a spacious four-bedroom, four-bathroom apartment that she shared with her five-year-old son and a domestic worker named Mary. Mosa is a 39-year-old Kuwaiti diviner who periodically conducted divination readings in her home. There are various terms that are used to denote divination such as *gira'a* (reading), and *ta'shoof* (to see), and *faal*, the Arabic word for fate, or omen (Daneshgar 2016). In this thesis I use the term *faal* because it was the most commonly used term.

The beginning of my stay with Mosa coincided with the middle of Ramadan, and I had anticipated that she would not be conducting *faal* sessions during the holy month, as the practice is largely perceived as un-Islamic in modern day Kuwait. To my surprise, Mosa had two appointments during my first week at her home. On the day of the first appointment, about an hour before the client was scheduled to arrive, Mosa began to prepare. The jinn whom she called al-Malik **(**which translates into "the king") had made a request. Mosa describes al-Malik's request as manifesting through a sensation akin to a craving, she used the word "*titsana'a*" which refers to the cravings that pregnant women experience.[24] What she craved in particular, and how she fulfilled his request was not initially explained to me. Before Mosa began her preparation, she always performed an ablution (*wudho*) and then entered her bedroom. I was asked to stay outside while she prepared for fifteen minutes. When she had finished the preparations, I was permitted to enter quietly and sit on her bed, where I was to remain seated.

When I entered Mosa's bedroom, I noticed it was fairly hazy from the *bukhoor* (incense) smoke that had nearly filled the entire space. The bedroom was wide and long, with a large bed located in the center of the back wall. There was a black leather couch against the foot of the bed

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[24] Al-Malik is also one of the 99 names of God, meaning, the owner of the Universe, the absolute.

with a rectangular black coffee table in front of it. Mosa was seated cross-legged on the floor, with her back resting against the front of the couch. She had placed a *mabkhara* (a censer) on the floor to her right so that she was submerged in smoke. To her left, on the coffee table, she had a tray with torn and emptied cigarettes, loose tobacco, morsels of hashish, rolling paper and a rolled-up hashish cigarette half-smoked, waiting for her. The combination of fragrant woody and floral notes from the burning *bukhoor*, the dark resinous aroma of the hashish and the traces of tobacco made me feel slightly lightheaded. I could hear a recording playing from Mosa's phone, the sound was a grainy texture. I had to listen carefully to grasp the words beneath the fuzziness of the recording. The recording was of Mosa reciting Quranic *ayat* (verses), not one in particular, but a blend of multiple *ayas* laced together in a way that created some coherence.

Mosa had her eyes closed, she looked pensive, gently moving, as if her body was responding to the rhythm of the Quranic recitation. I saw her lips were moving, I suspect she was chanting with the recording, but her mouth was barely open, rendering her chants impossible to decipher. Her state continued for another six minutes, after which she opened her eyes and instinctively, without turning her head (or eyes), reached for her hashish cigarette and lighter, lit it and began to smoke. She did not acknowledge my presence. She remained seated, still, and quiet, smoking and watching the *bukhoor* and hashish smoke undulate and disperse. Five minutes later, the recording ended, and while she maintained her fixed gaze on the smoke, she abruptly spoke, "go tell Mary [domestic labourer] to make some rice" in a raspy, deep, and expressionless voice. I fulfilled her request, and when I re-entered the room, I saw her clearing any evidence of hashish and cigarettes. I sensed her clients were nearby.

This vignette underscores the different registers of Islamic practices. *Faal*, *sihr*, hashish, and engagements with jinn are all explicitly forbidden by state Islam, and by extension, all

authorized Islamic discourses regardless of sect in Kuwait. And yet, Mosa performs ablution, chants Islamic Quranic *ayat*, while engaging in all of the prohibited practices. On the one hand, this chapter explores the extent to which Mosa and her clients respond to state norms. In particular, I analyze *faal,* how it is conceptualized, practiced, and legitimated. In particular, I emphasize the ways in which participants reconfigure content and practices in relation to their specific position. Drawing on various scholars, I conceptualize "localization" as the "field of power" (Asad 1993) where state authorized Islam, socioeconomics and larger historical processes and contingencies work to produce registers of licit and illicit Islam (Asad 1993; Mahmood 2005). While rejecting homogenizing accounts of Islam, I ask what are the epistemological and ontological effects produced by the "field of power" (ibid)? On the other hand, I analyze jinn encounters, *faal*, and dream-visitations as technologies of the imagination which serve to shape reality as well as the participants themselves.

This chapter attempts to answer these lines of inquiry through three distinct yet overlapping avenues that assemble a window into Mosa's life and her *faal* practices. In the first avenue, I begin with analyzing Mosa's "call" (Spadola 2013) to Islam through a divinely inspired dream-vision. I analyze how she responds to her call through performance, narrative and discourse. Then, I explicate the logics and modes of understanding that underpin Mosa's *faal* practice and how it relates to notions of piety. In the final third section, I give an account of *faal* sessions as they unfold to better understand who participates in such practices, and for what purpose.

Mosa's Call

Lucine Taminian avers that jinn are a metaphor of empowerment that are continuously invoked by various claimants (poets, saints, politicians, and healers) who can convince their clientele of

their control over these ethereal entities (2001:82). Jinn were inextricably linked to Mosa's privileged position as a seer. Spending nearly three weeks living with Mosa, I had many conversations with Mary as well. During one conversation Mary told me that she had accidentally walked in on Mosa while she was sitting on the floor, smoking and swaying to "music". Mosa subsequently began locking her door during her sessions. From this detail, I reasoned that Mosa's performances were part and parcel of her role as a diviner, as a woman with distinguished authority and privileged access. These performances began with a tragedy Mosa faced; she explained that she received her call during an exceptionally emotional period in her life. She was twenty-nine years old, when the man she had expected to marry informed her that he could not marry her. The man's parents refused to consent to the marriage. In local cultural custom, the parents of the potential bride and groom must agree on the marriage before the marriage can take place. Thus, despite the man wanting to marry Mosa, his parent's rejection rendered the union impossible. She was absolutely distraught, and it was several nights after this incident that she experienced her call which manifested in her dream. She described her dream as being present in a space where nothing else existed. She simply stood alone amidst the white-grey nothingness; there were no angles, curves, or outlines, only a white-grey blank that extended all around her. She said despite the strangeness, she felt calm and clear-headed. Mosa then saw a man walking towards her, dressed in a crisp white *dishdasha* (traditional Kuwaiti dress for men). He stopped directly in front of her, and she recognized him to be her suitor. In her own words,

"It looked like him (her suitor), but as soon as he spoke, I knew it wasn't him. His voice was calm, and clear but distinctly not the voice of the man I knew. He asked me why I had stopped praying, that I had to continue. 'Until when, until when will you abstain from your

duties,' he told me. I felt so guilty. I asked him who he was, and he said, he was al-Malik, he who is always with me".

Mosa identified al-Malik as a *qareen,* a specific type of jinn. Within Islamic cosmology, jinn are analogous to humans, in that they live in societies, possess free will; they may choose their religion, and between good and evil. They are created from smokeless fire, and thus, they possess a distinct nature and inhabit a separate but parallel realm. According to Mosa, each human is allocated a qareen from the time they are born until they die. The jinn are understood to have free-will and thus choose how to live, they choose to be malevolent or virtuous, and sometimes oscillate between the two. Mosa believed al-Malik to be the latter because of how he impelled her towards a life of piety: "He told me to live a life of piety and to accept what was not for me; *astaslim* (to submit) to Allah. The man I had wanted to marry (whose body he was in) was not my *nasib* (destined for me). He told me that I will be able to see into *alghayb* (the unknown), and be able to hear him in waking day, and I would feel him".[25]

Mosa's relationship to al-Malik, *sihr*, divination and general life trajectory emerged through her dream-vision. In other words, Mosa's dream-vision served as a technology of the imagination, precipitating a transformation in her perspective, experience, and action. The dream-vision contained revelations and prescriptions, a particular call to Islam and a response to this call. The significance of dream-visions as the medium in which Mosa received her "call" can be better elucidated through reference to the work of Amira Mittermaier. In her remarkable book, *Dreams that Matter* (2011) she argues that certain dreams matter precisely because they place the dreamer into "a wider network of symbolic debts, relationships, and meanings" (2011:3). Dreams allow the dreamer to enter social relationships with other forces, entities, and the Divine.

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[25] Alghayb is an Arabic term that expresses "that which is concealed". The realm(s) of the unseen include the divine, jinn, angels, hell, heaven and the future.

Mittermaier pays special attention to dream visitations from the *ru'ya* variety for their propensity to transform the subject. She draws on Foucault to understand how dreamers are affected by their dreams in specific contexts, in that dreams via the imagination do not bring forth to presence that which is absent, they do not transport the dreamer to the world of dreams, but the dream becomes the dreamer's world (Mittermaier 2011:18; Foucault 1968:67). She explains, the "self does not simply cultivate particular states and experiences, but is also constituted by them," and thus, it is the "dream's agency that matters more than the dreamers" (2011:5). This is because the dreamer experiences these dreams not as coming from their self, but as coming from "Elsewhere" (the divine, the spiritual, other entities). These dreams allow for transformation in their call for a response, in their reorientation of life trajectories (2011).

It is important to note that Mosa's call was audible to her because she was accustomed to the symbols and beliefs (jinn, *qareen* and *alghayb*) that presupposed her dreams-visions, and their signification. In other words, she was already equipped with a grammar (personal and state-sanctioned) through which she could first identify and then understand her particular "call". Thus, a dream can be said to precipitate transformation only if the dreamer is conditioned, cultivated first to recognize, and then to understand the dream-vision. Under such circumstances, dreams can be powerful in their quality to disrupt.

Mosa's dream-vision beckoned her to take up a more pious existence than she was previously living. She did not view herself, her life nor her world through the same lens, she felt an urgency to transform in relation to her new acquired perspective. In other words, Mosa's divinely ordained dream-vision catalyzed a transformation through which her style of imaginative perception was altered. I wondered what Mosa meant by piety, and how she came to define such actions and ideas as pious.

Piety

The Arabic term Mosa used to describe her transformation was "*mutadayana*"— to become religious. Mosa explained religiosity under two related but distinct fields, "*iltizam*" (commitment) and "*suluk*" (attitude) or "*titsarafat*" (everyday conduct). *Iltizam* constituted praying, fasting, dressing appropriately, *du'a* (invocation or prayer supplication). Essentially, *iltizam* are mandatory Islamic commitments that all Muslims must observe. Mosa identifies the school and lectures she heard in *hussaniyas* as centres of Islamic education.[26] Mosa learned Islam through repeated encounters with state or state regulated institutions (school, mosques, media, religious teachers), her family and social circles. More generally, she learned through her own observations of what and how other Muslims practiced Islam. Mosa's family and social circles had also come to know Islam through the engagements with the same institutions. This produces certain elements that become shared by Muslims regardless of one's sect. Forms of piety and that which is understood to be "*haram*" (Islamically illicit) becomes standardized, such as forms of dress, appropriate conduct, and the prohibition of *sihr*, *faal* and jinn engagements. In this way, state sanctioned Islamic discourses and practices accrue power by virtue of their repetition (Spadola 2013:7).

Mosa shared with me the insight she had gained over time:

> What I realized over time through my encounters with people who defined themselves as very religious is that they in fact, were not. They would fast and pray all of the time, they would dress in an *abaya* or have a short *dishdasha* and a long beard, but their attitude

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[26] Hussaniya is a congregation hall for Shia commemoration ceremonies, especially those associated with the Remembrance of Muharram (the first month in the Islamic calendar commemorating the assassination of Imam Hussain) (Soheili and Bishirzadeh 2015).

(*suluk*), the way they dealt with other people did match their religious image.[27] Their

behavior was not Islamic. One must observe Islamic rules as they are *sula* (link) to Allah

not merely in how we represent ourselves (i.e., dress) but in our dealings with others.

To aid and benefit others were points Mosa emphasized in her understanding of Islam, and an

ethic she came to live by as demanded by her calling. Subsequently, her actions followed suit:

Mosa began to pray consistently, she took up wearing the veil, and practiced *sihr*, *faal* and rituals

to help and guide others. Mosa understood her response in part as taking up a pious life. She also

understood her response as living a life of meaning and purpose, in particular, through practicing

sihr and *faal*.

State Norms

The terms *faal* and *sihr* are censored and only deployed through mandates that seek to associate

them with ignorance, corruption or straying from Islam.[28] Since the Kuwaiti population is

slightly over one million, when public state supported pronouncements are made (through

newspaper, television, and magazines), the message is rarely inaudible. In other words, when

something is printed it also circulates widely in popular knowledge. For example, a popular local

media source wrote in Al-Anba magazine:

> "Ignorance, envy, and distance from religion have allowed people to accept superstitions,
>
> astrology, sorcery, and fortune telling. There are popular markets that sell amulets and
>
> read coffee cups and oddly enough, many of the participants are university educated".[29]

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[27] An *abaya* is a traditional black cloak that sits over a woman's heads, and drapes over her body. A *dishdasha* is traditional men's clothing in the Gulf. It is a long white robe.

[28] Kuwaiti law stipulates the censorship of any content that contradicts religious norms (Al Khirs et al 1983).

[29] https://www.alanba.com.kw/kottab/youssuf-abdulrahman/210500/08-07-2011-%D8%B3%D8%AD%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D8%B1%D9%8A%D9%85-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%83%D9%88%D9%8A%D8%AA/

More recently, in 2017, an attorney named Mohammad Al Huwaila demanded penalties for
those who do not report *sihr* and *faal* upon discovery, arguing that such practices are anti-
Muslim and violate the Shari'a.[30] Furthermore, the General secretary of the Salafist movement
initiated a campaign through local mosques, Islamic schools, and media with the support of the
Ministry of endowments and Islamic Affairs to antagonize *sihr*, possession rituals, and *faal*
framed as pre-Islamic blasphemous practices. This began with a fatwa (a non-enforceable legal
opinion) in 2011 against *faal*, *sihr* and jinn possession rituals rendering them evil (a practice of
Iblis).[31]

  Mosa was not oblivious to these discourses, and while discussing the subject of jinn she
was implicitly responding to such critiques. For example, she mentioned that it is often believed
that God prohibited human and jinn interaction. She knew this was a dominant view because it
was the hegemonic understanding. In this context, Mosa does not adhere to this understanding of
jinn and human relationships, as she put it, "jinn who interact with people are not automatically
shayatin (jinn who follow Iblis). This simply is not true. Just like there are good and bad people,
there are good and bad jinn. It says so in the Quran."

  Mosa added another point to her understanding of jinn, a point which she roots in the
Qur'an. She states whether a jinn is understood to be evil or good, neither can force a human-
being to act, they merely test one's faith. In her words,

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[30] Taken from http://www.kna.kw/clt-html5/news-details.asp?id=27711 Al Huwaila detailed a fairly comprehensive
list that was deemed far too vague for the courts to be passed. For example, he lists "use of any incomprehensible
words" or "intension of exploiting others".

[31] Fatwa is categorized as "fatwa No. 8E/201. The Kuwaiti Ministry of Endowments and Islamic Affairs has
published an "Encyclopedia of Islamic Jurisprudence", the largest encyclopedia authored and published in the
Arabic language. The Encyclopedia project was officially initiated in 1965 and a wide number of Islamic scholars
contributed through its completion in 2005. The Encyclopedia of Islamic Jurisprudence (*Mausua Fiqhiya
Kuwaitiya)* was prepared in alphabetical order and published in 45 volumes reaching about 17,650 pages. It
encompasses the Fiqh (Islamic Jurisprudence) of all four major Islamic schools of thought. It has been translated
into Urdu, and Farsi and is subject to wide circulation. http://islam.gov.kw/Pages/en/PublicationDetails.aspx?id=12

"*Shayatin* do not follow Allah, they follow Iblis. In their world [followers of Iblis] it is a significant task to implore the pious to sin. To turn people against Allah is their only objective. They will lie and deceive you, and make you think good is bad and bad is good. But they cannot force you to turn against God. You make the last decision; do you succumb to Iblis or not? Is your faith strong, or are you weak?"

Volition was a prominent theme in Mosa's understanding of Islam. When clarifying the nature of her relationship with al-Malik, she used the concept of volition. Mosa said that she would "feel" (*ithis*) al-Malik, during other times, she used the word "communicate" (*titkalam*) to describe their interaction. Mosa is careful to contextualize what she meant by "communicate," as jinn do not speak in the way people do, communicating instead in the form of "thought-feeling". It is an internal exchange located in the mind, it is experienced as a potent, and foreign thought-stream. Mosa's communication with al-Malik provides her with moral guidance, and aid in *sihr* rituals. She never used the word "possession" to describe her engagements with al-Malik, as she perceived possession as *haram* (illicit). She regarded possession as a form of submission to jinn, defined as a state in which the jinn gain control over one's consciousness, and, in turn, one's body. She mentioned another diviner, Maryam, who I had met earlier, as a case in point. According to Mosa, Maryam wants the jinn to possess her because she enjoys it. "She does not care if it's *haram*, she prioritizes her enjoyment."[32]

For Mosa, the jinn are only able to dominate individuals with the consent of that individual; it is an act of volition, one chooses to submit. Mosa emphasizes that submission is reserved for God exclusively, and therefore, one must not allow or give any jinn (evil or virtuous) control. Mosa is not negating Salafi-State-Islamic discourses here, in fact, she is

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[32] By "enjoyment" Mosa did not imply sexual enjoyment. She has explicitly made associates between sexuality and jinn in other contexts, this was not one such context.

reiterating their norms; she views her actions be an expression of her devotion and piety to God, and she rejects possession. She even recapitulates state Islamic narrative of jinn as able to create temptation away from God, and thus, modulating her practices in relation to state Islam. In doing so, she reinserts *sihr* practices as part and parcel of state Islam. This means that divination, jinn, and *sihr* practices are no longer positioned as antithetical to state Islam, but as rooted within the tradition. Thus, it is a double movement, where state Islam modulate *sihr* and divination practices, which then enables the modulation the parameters of state Islam; of what can be included and excluded.

Shifting Status

Mittermaier argues that Aristotle thought it absurd that dreams would ever entail divine messages, for then anyone could experience the divine. She states that it is precisely because anyone can receive divine dreams that dreams are endowed with the ability to rupture hierarchical power structures and paradigms (2011:13). Drawing on Mittermaier's observations I contextualize Mosa's position in Kuwaiti society, in relation to her call, her new status as a practitioner of *faal*, *sihr* and jinn.

Mosa has now been living in an apartment with her son and Mary for four years. Mosa's living situation is unusual for Kuwaiti society as women most often return to live in their natal home after divorce. Mosa did not return to her natal home, as her parents were divorced, and her father had passed away when she was twenty-two, nor did She have any siblings. Due to a number of complex and unrelated events and circumstances, Mosa and her mother maintained relative distance from their extended family. After Mosa's father passed away, her mother remarried and lived with her new husband in a small apartment. Mosa described the discomfort

that living with her mother and stepfather had caused. While her relationship with her stepfather was positive, it was formal in nature, she described it akin to living with company.

It was a combination of her estrangement from her extended family, the absence of her father, elder siblings and relative economic independence that equipped Mosa with the agency to determine her own living arrangement. Mosa's relative economic independence stemmed from the Kuwaiti system of welfare provision. Under the Kuwaiti constitution, the "right to work" guarantees each Kuwaiti citizen employment. As a result, nearly seventy percent of the Kuwaiti population is employed in the public sector. Mosa works "full-time" in the Ministry of electricity and water. Her position is shared with seven other women, creating a situation with an overly crowded office with a little or no work for the employees. The solution provided by Mosa and her co-workers sympathetic supervisor was to divide the position between them. As a result, Mosa was only required to attend work once to twice a week. On average, Mosa spent five hours per week at work, and received a full salary every month.[33] This is not an unusual circumstance, and as I have mentioned, and the majority of the Kuwaiti populace employed within the public sector also work sparse hours.[34]

However, Mosa's distanced family relation, and subsequent marginal social position differentiates her position from her collogues. The sociologist Khaled Al Thakeb conducted an analysis of Kuwaiti families through registries. He analyzed the relationship between family, habitation patterns and socioeconomics in Kuwait. Because almost all of the neighborhoods in

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[33] Other ministries may require more frequent attendance, but the work load is still largely minimal. "Working hours under Kuwait labor law are a maximum of 48 hours per week and 8 hours a day for a 6-day work week. This is generally speaking and for most office jobs; some specific jobs have their own restrictions under bylaws from the ministry.
Employees will not be required to work more than 5 consecutive hours without a one-hour break in between".

[34] Of course there are many exception to this, as many citizens do work long hours. This has been increasing with the rise of cost of living. Nevertheless, in terms of statistics, the majority of the population continue to be employed by the public sector, with little work. There have even been local short films made to mock public sector jobs, or "*wizara*" ministry work. (https://news.kuwaittimes.net/website/kuwaitis-make-74-percent-public-sector-employees/

Kuwait are recently designed, with a well- run household registration system, and since Kuwait has only one major city, Al Thakeb was able to obtain substantial information and make significant observations about normative Kuwaiti familial life. He claims that in the 1980s, thirty-five percent of Kuwaitis visited their families daily (1985:577). Forty-five percent of Kuwaitis visited their families weekly, and seventeen percent monthly (ibid). He explains that such relationships were facilitated by proximity of residence, where forty-three percent of families had relatives living next door, usually a sibling (Al-Thakeb 1982). While in fifty percent of lower socioeconomic households, extended families lived together. These living arrangements impact economic cooperation as well as multiple forms of care, and the reduction of isolation and alienation (Al-Thakeb 1985).[35] Lastly, in Al-Thakeb's analysis, eighty-seven percent of Kuwaitis prefer to spend their leisure time with family, at home or travelling during holidays. The point here is that the majority of Kuwaitis spend their time with and around family life which often entail large family structures that include extended family.

Mosa's fragmented family and in turn, marginal social life places her outside of the norm. She does not have kin she sees on a regular basis, nor does she have siblings, or a husband that would provide her with an in-law family. Moreover, employment does not offer an alternate mode of sociality, as regular attendance is not required. Thus, Mosa's social encounters are restricted, Mosa's leisure becomes a double-edged sword, in that she is liberated from working, and domestic chores, as Mary frees her from those duties, and yet, by Mosa's own account, the absence of a husband, social network, a family and everyday activity creates a void in her everyday life. Mosa's compromised position in Kuwait society is compounded by another form of social marginality, tribal status. Economic status coincides with social status which is largely

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[35] Business relationships were relatively strong, especially among siblings; 24% of those who had businesses had relatives as partners. Among those who worked for the government, 27% had relatives in the workplace (Al-Thakeb 1985).

predicated on tribal affiliation and association (Al-Nakib 2016). Mosa's family is located near the base of the hierarchy, with little political and economic influence.[36] In this way, Mosa experiences two levels of alienation that combine and deepen the effects of isolation: the first in relation to her family, and the second, in relation to society.

Mosa's new position as someone with privileged access to *alghayb* via divine sanction, to conduct *faal* and *sihr,* and to aid others served to rupture the social hierarchy she was locked in. For example, many clients who come to Mosa are from wealthy socioeconomic backgrounds; in fact, her most frequent client is a member of the ruling family. However, when they come into Mosa's relatively humble home, their social position becomes largely irrelevant, as Mosa occupies the position of authority and wisdom. The form of interaction is often dictated by Mosa, by which I mean, Mosa decides whom to conduct *faal* and *sihr* for, when the sessions will be, and how long they will last.[37] Mosa's ritual status and, her abilities— understood as divinely sanctioned— have become a means of elevation, respect, meaning and power. Lucinda Ramberg's work on *jogatis* in Southern India would serve to better articulate his point. Ramberg argues that dalit (a community located outside of the caste system) women dedicated to the Goddess Yellamma become pujaris (priests) for yellamma, "whom they embody and whose blessings they are empowered to bestow in rites of life passage, healing and fertility" (2011:41). While *jogatis* remain dalit women with low status, they were highly auspicious, imbued with ritual efficacy and power, engaging with both upper-caste and lower-caste devotees (Ramberg

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[36] I cannot name the tribe for the purpose of protecting Mosa's anonymity.

[37] Many of the diviners I spoke to reiterate the same context. I have never encountered a situation where the clients did not pay the diviner, or attempted to exploit them. I did however, encounter one story where a foreign male *sihr* practitioner was conducting *sihr* for many women from the same social circle. This did not end well; I was told one of his last clients reported him to the authorities. Why did she report him? I heard two variations, 1) she did not like the idea that her friends were receiving the same privileges, 2) she felt he exploited her, as her *sihr* did not take?. This story was told to me **to**? alleged previous clients of this man. This is to illustrate that in some contexts, *sihr* practitioners may be vulnerable to their clients. On the other hand, this story was repeated to me by a group of diviners to demonstrate why they do not conduct *sihr* for anyone.

2014). In other words, *jogatis* demanded respect because of their divinely ordained position that was unavailable to other dalit women (Ramberg 2014:151).

In the same vein, during *faal*, and *sihr* sessions, Mosa's lack of social status was superseded by ritualistic authority divinely sanctioned. However, the temporality and intensely private and secretive nature of the practices circumscribe her authority and status to the sessions in she conducts. Consequently, the status reversal of the practitioner and the client only lasts duration of the sessions, when Mosa interacts with people in her capacity as a diviner and *sihr* practitioner. Once Mosa is no longer interacting with others through ritualistic authority, her status is no longer legible to others. Therein lies the significance of the status reversal, it is ephemeral, and confined to the private sphere. This dynamic characterized my own relationship with Mosa in a slightly altered form, as I was not a client, but nevertheless, a recipient of her authority and guidance. She did not ask me for financial compensation, although I did offer, which she refused, as it is customary for the host to do so in Kuwait.[38] The fact that Mosa and I stemmed from different socio-economic backgrounds and family arrangements did not matter, I was Mosa's student, and she was my teacher. She enjoyed teaching me, on the rare occasion when I forgot to record our conversations, she would promptly remind me, "why aren't you recording this?" She told me that Allah always sent her individuals who require her help, and she understood that I was one of those people. I could not deny the fact that I did very much need her help, and specifically, her knowledge. In this way, Mosa used my stay with her as an indication (for me) and a reminder (for her) of her calling.

Mosa's distinct status is performed through her technologies (*sihr*, *faal*, engaging with jinn) and even my own presence as a modality of self-cultivation. The activities provide Mosa

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[38] The only tasks she requested was that I watch her son while she was out and help him improve his English.

not only with an identity but with meaning and purpose in life. While situated outside of

ritualistic contexts, Mosa's life remains one of relative isolation, and monotony. It is important to

note that Mosa does not view parts of her life as "outside" of her call. The style in which she

imagines her life through her calling does not "turn off" but instead, Mosa's dream-vision

reconstitutes how information and stimuli are sifted and arranged. It is an ongoing process,

everyday experiences and memories of the past are negotiated to produce elaborations

reaffirming her call. This is exemplified through each of her clients, as well as my own presence.

In the next section, while outlining the mechanism of Mosa's *faal* practice, I give specific

examples of how Mosa consistently draws on the textual tradition of Salafi Islam to resignify her

practices from illicit to licit and thereby recreating the boundaries of state Islam, of what can be

included and excluded.

Faal in Theory

Mosa understood the practice of *faal* reading as the acquisition of truth, guidance and meaning

through divine mediation. *Faal* reading also entails the technicalities and physical objects of the

practice. *Faal* can be conducted through various methods, such as playing cards, tea leaves,

coffee residue, and a practice referred to as *dasha*. The Arabic word "*dasha*" means "to spill"

and literally entails the dropping of shells and a multitude of other small objects used as signs

that signify specific meanings. Frequently used objects include gems, rocks, rings, brooches with

"Allah" engraving, coins, animal figurines, keys, locks, animal bones and dice. Mosa initially

learned the technicalities of reading *faal* through a friend who taught her how to assemble the

dasha, and the types of symbols to incorporate.

Mosa has experimented with several forms of divination methods but said that the *dasha*

resonated with her spiritually. She does not regard other mediums as lesser, but only that each

individual seems to prefer a medium that complements them, a medium they connect with on various levels (physically, intellectually, spiritually and psychologically). Furthermore, different diviners may use the same medium, but obtain different insight. Some seers are gifted with knowledge of the distant future, other seers can only see only the past, some the present and others are better at reading people. These features are discovered through trials. As a result, each diviner has distinct preferences, approaches to reading, and manners of relating to their spiritual tools.

The Idiosyncrasies of Practice

This personal approach to *faal* is illuminated by Isabelle Nabokov's book**,** *Religion against the Self* (2000), in which she argues that the form possession takes reflects both a spirit or demon and the individual's own personality, and emotions. Nabokov suggests that each person gives form to their own ritual cosmology, "as they complete what is "publicly" known of the supernatural with highly specific, felt significances created out of their 'private' biographies and existential circumstances" (2000:9-10). In the context of divination, diviners share commonalities pertaining to *faal* readings such as the tools they use, "seeing" into the past, present or future, and the ability to fluently understand and interpret what is revealed to them. All of the diviners I have met, a total of six women and three men, understand themselves as possessing the ability to access *alghayb* and they reveal what they see within a moral framework. The diviner's moral framework is always invoked during the sessions, for they caution and admonish behavior, actions, intentions, and desires.

How each diviner conceptualized their ability to see into *alghayb*, the particularities of their tools, the meanings of signs and symbols, and the perspectives (i.e., moral framework) diviners took are the private specificities that vary amongst the diviners. For example, one

woman I met understood her gift as knowing the past through reading people's thoughts. She only read for clients in person through coffee, as she required their presence to drink the coffee, and imbue the coffee residue with their energy and intentions. She asks the client to drink with a specific question or concern in mind, and then proceeds to read their thoughts, and the past events, intentions, and actions that affect their present issue, all in their coffee cup. Another example pertains to the recognition of symbols, and the meanings different diviners ascribe to the same symbols. For instance, I observed two diviners ascribe different meanings to a camel, one read it as a symbol of death, while the other as a gift. The diviners explained to me that this does not delegitimize the practice, as the message manifests through symbols legible to the diviner, and each diviner understands distinct symbols differently.

These differences were obvious to the clients as well; each client was partial to a particular diviner often not because of veracity, but because they felt connected, or understood by the diviner. For example, I frequently spoke to a client called Hadeel because she knew many diviners, and she indicated that she preferred Mosa over many other diviners because had a "softer personality" and that was reflected in her readings. By "softer personality", Hadeel meant that Mosa was sensitive in her delivery, she allowed the client to react and respond to her reading.

On one occasion, during a session with Mosa, Hadeel wanted to inquire about the man she was courting. A diviner she had gone to see before Mosa, told her that she and this man were incompatible. When Hadeel made the same inquiry to Mosa; Mosa told her that although their personalities were indeed quite different, it could be a successful match because they had common interests. Mosa explained that he was very shy, whereas Hadeel was bolder, and so encouraged Hadeel to take the necessary steps to get to know his characteristics and sensibilities,

and to gradually introduce hers. I mentioned what Hadeel told me to Mosa — that Hadeel

believed diviner's personalities were reflected in their readings— to which Mosa agreed, adding

that the diviner's own perspective, values, and wisdom is revealed through their reading as well.

For example, she explained, "if a client asked whether they should attend a party on a particular

evening because they were concerned about an early meeting the next morning, how should the

diviner answer?" Hadeel used this question as a means of describing the complexities and

nuances of divinatory knowledge and methods:

> "Does the diviner suggest foregoing the party or attending because they may have some
>
> life-changing experience, despite the consequences they may face? Does the diviner take
>
> into consideration the severity of consequences and compare to what the client will
>
> experience during the party? Or does the diviner tell the client to attend the party face
>
> harsh consequences as a lesson through experience?"

Hadeel concluded, "this all depends on the diviner, their values and perspective, and the extent to

which the diviner considers the client's personality."

What can be deduced from Hadeel and Mosa's descriptions of *faal* sessions is that it is a

deeply intersubjective, idiosyncratic form of counsel that seems to be generated through the

interaction between diviner and client. Nabokov helps more to understand the idiosyncratic form

many rituals take, the type of knowledge each diviner produces. In turn, each client prefers a

diviner with whom he or she resonates with. In the example of Hadeel, she does not refer to the

first diviner as false but preferred Mosa because she provided more positive insight and guidance

to remedy her concerns. In other words, Hadeel did not distinguish between Mosa and the first

diviner "by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they imagined" (Anderson

1983:6). However, when I reiterated my understanding of the diviner's idiosyncratic form of

"seeing" as all equal but different, she responded with a resolute "no. A diviner with a more developed *aql* will be the better diviner."

Aql

Mosa describes a talented diviner as one who possesses "*aql*" which is often translated into "reason" or "rationality".[39] For many scholars of divination, the categories of rationality and irrationality undergird their analysis of divination (Tedlock 1991; Winkelman & Peek 2004).[40] This tradition dates as far back as Tylor (at least), where he, and others after he posit "magic" and "magical" thinking as proto-scientific forms of thinking (Tylor 1871; Levy-Bruhl 1923). Other anthropologists maintain that despite "magic" and "magical" thinking's inferior relationships of causality, it may still be effective in exerting control over the environment (Evans-Pritchard 1937; Levi-Strauss 1966).[41] Many of these scholars take for granted the definition of rationality as "the quality of being based on or in accordance with reason or logic".[42] Brian Epstein, in his article, "The Diviner and the Scientist", explains that the categories of "scientific rationality" as a "formal, logical ideal for forming beliefs or choosing action" has largely diminished because of the importance of contextual factors that are imperative in determining whether a belief or action is rational" (2010:5&15).

[39] Lara Deeb, in her ethnography, *Enchanted Modern*, does not strictly define "*aql*" as rationality in abstract form, but contextualizes rationality as the imperative between the relationship of authentication and modern-ness. "*Aql*" is a processual nature of authentication that contrasts between orthodox modern and non-orthodox tradition Islam (2008:21). Rula Abisaab argues that "*aql*" in the context of jurisprudence is an embedded feature of a tradition and not a universal constant category opposing scripture (*taqlid*, or emulation) (2015).

[40] Barbara Tedlock categories divination into four types: omen, pattern, symbol, and trance. These four types are then divided into two categories of divination: inductive (rational) and mediumistic (non-rational) (2006). Tedlock writes that these two categories may shift from on to the other in one session (ibid). Philip Peek contributes to the rational/irrational debate by arguing that both inductive and mediumistic categories were created from Eurocentric perspectives, that separates rational from the irrational (1991). He contends, in Africa it is the norm for divination systems to be predicated on both rational and irrational qualities (ibid).

[41] Evans-Pritchard further compares "primitive thinking" to his owns culture and concludes that "magical thinking is no less characteristic of our own mundane intellectual activity than it is of Zande curing practices (1935:36). The anthropologists Laura Bear, and the political scientist Philip Tetlock take this argument further, and empirically demonstrate how modern capitalist forecasting is essentially a mode of divination. (Bear 2015; Tetlock 2016).

[42] Brain Epstein suggests a reworking of rationality so that it is a more inclusive and "a broader category indicating a rightness or faultiness in forming a belief or choosing an action" (Epstein 2010:5).

In the context of Mosa's "*aql*", the categories of rationality and irrationality do not

suffice to understand the essence of "*aql*".[43] I steer away from categories of irrationality,

rationality, or scientific and instead, offer an understanding of "*aql*" as derived from contextual

examples. I do not attempt to ambitiously provide a universal and abstract definition of "*aql*" but

elucidate the way in which Mosa understands it, and the type of knowledge it entails. In doing

so, I ground "*aql*" in the factors and contingencies that render it possible for Mosa.

Mosa explains that initially, her ability "to see" (*itshoof*) *faal* needed to be cultivated, it

was learning to exercise her *aql* that helped to improve her skill. Mosa explains, often "we look,

but we do not see. I may have what I need to see, but I needed to learn how to use it". Mosa was

not referring to the *dasha but* learning to use her *aql*. The word "*aql*" etymologically derives

from the word "*iqal*" that historically meant the tying of camel's legs to restrain or keep them

steady. Thus, an abstraction of this meaning refers to the faculty that restrains human beings, a

form of moderation that is the opposite of excess. In other words, *aql* under this description can

be defined as temperance. Mosa invokes certain elements of this definition to describe *aql*; she

mentions how one should abstain from judging others, and to take the time to understand. She

mentions a culturally prevalent saying, "those who have *aql* in their heads, know the best

solutions" (*aql fee rasa eearf khalasa*). This is a partial understanding of *aql*, because for Mosa,

there is an ethical component; when she says, "best solutions" she meant the most ethical

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[43] *Aql* appears as a canonical concept in the large part of philosophy, theology, logic, jurisprudence, and, even, religious sacred texts, so that one may find various manifestations of these terms in various texts on Qur'anic commentary, theology, philosophy, and jurisprudence. The words derived from the Arabic "*aql*" (intellect / intelligence / reason) have been used 49 times in Qur'an but never the word itself (2: 75, 10:16, 13: 4, 67: 10). *Aql* in the Qur'an serves a number of reasons, including: (1) as a means to know God, to prove His existence and His oneness; (2) as a means to know the universe, its origin, and its laws, (3) as a means to know the commands of God (i.e. religious rules and decrees originated from God); (4) as a means to get belief in life after death; and (5) as a means to judge human actions according to the Divine laws. (Akrami 2017:64).

solution in relation to God. *Aql* is not simply to restrain oneself, but to bind oneself to God; to confine oneself to God. Drawing on Surah -Ashams Mosa explained:

> "The *nafs* is inspired with both good and bad, you use your *aql* and you choose which path you want to take. Emotions are both bad and good, but often we get stuck to bad ones. Our vision can become obstructed by what we feel. When I started using my *aql*, I was no longer blinded by my *nafs*. This allowed my *rooh* (soul) to open-up and feel. Your *aql* sees with your *rooh*, it feels al *nafs* but does not see with it; it is not blinded by it. For example, in Islam, we worship Allah, but we do not try to understand Allah. How can the creations understand the creator? Your *nafs* may demand to understand Allah, but your aql will remind you of your human limitations, for how can we use our logic (*mantiq*) to understand the creator of all logics? There are many things I do not know, and that I can never know, I only know what Allah allows me to know. This is why my *dasha* serves for *tanbeeh* (to direct, precaution or advise) others in what they are doing, and how to live better."

This vignette reveals Mosa's conception of a person, and how a person can relate to the divine. She distinguishes between the *rooh*, *nafs*, *mantiq* and *aql* in interesting ways. For Mosa, the totality of an individual is comprised out of attributes (*sufa*) the *rooh* and *nafs,* each of which is imbued with its own essence encased within the body. Where *aql* is the faulty of the *rooh*, the higher spirit that is linked with the divine; and *mantiq* is associated with the *nafs*, the locus of emotion, sensation, and all things related to the material world. It is noteworthy that Mosa links *mantiq* with the *nafs*, because the word *mantiq* etymologically stems from the Arabic word "*nutq*" meaning "speech," "utterance" or "oration" (Akrami 2017:69).[44] In other words, *mantiq*

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[44] For example, "Mantiq ot-Tair" is the language of birds that Solomon had been taught (Qur'an, al-Naml: 16).

is associated with discourse, modes of speaking and argumentation. *Aql*, on the other hand is a mental faculty, whose derivatives used in the Qur'an does not denote logic, but Islamic logic. By which I mean, ways of knowing God's existence (distinct from knowing God), as a tool for reasoning and arguing theological issues, and the logic of jurisprudence (Akrami 2017:70). Mosa is making a division between modes of knowing inexplicably linked with the divine, and by extension, disposition and ethics as opposed to forms of knowing through logic (*mantiq*) which she casts as only relative to the material ephemeral plain, and thus ill equipped to understand eternal truth (God). Through Mosa's understanding of *aql*, she limits what can be known and understood.

Through linking seeing into *alghayb* as seeing what God has decreed for her to know, she is able to reiterate the fundamental definition of divination. *Faal* is transformed from reading one's future, to receiving guiding points or insight from God via the diviner who has privileged access to such messages. Mosa is re-formulating *faal* into an ethical imperative. In what follows, I discuss how Mosa explicitly draws on the Islamic textual tradition to outline what she understands as ethics.

Absence of *Aql*

Mosa posits *aql* as a linkage to God, a link that is not given, but must be cultivated. It logically follows then, that she views many Muslims to be lacking *aql*. She demonstrates this claim by invoking an example of an obsessed man that spent his days praying and performing ablutions. "When Imam Ja'far was told about this man, the Imam replied, this man has no *aql* since he was

obeying Satan".[45] Mosa interprets the meaning of *aql* in Imam Ja'far's report as a mode of understanding one's duties to God. She clarifies,

> "A Muslim must worship Allah through five daily prayers, (by extension, following the five pillars) *and* through choosing good in everyday life. You know, there is no such thing as nuns in Islam, because no one is exempt from living, you cannot run away from life through prayer. Living piously is a form of prayer".

This begs the question, what does she mean by "choosing good"? Her response always defined moral action as living in accordance with Islamic prescriptions pertaining to the textual tradition: one must pray, fast, give charity and avoid sin. She specified particular moral claims: to avoid helping those who do not deserve it; she viewed anger as normal and human, but anger becomes dangerous when one acts on it. She said, the prophet of course became angry, but he would not act on it, and he would avoid the situations he knew would cause him to become angry. Another prohibition was hypocrisy (*munafaqa*) which stems from a Quranic tradition of denouncing this trait.[46]

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[45] Mosa has learned this story through her grandmother. They were referring to a reported encounter in al-Kulayni's Usul vol1 In this volume, Kulayni further writes, Ja'far reports Muhammad as saying, Later, responding to the question "What is *'aql*?" he said: "That by which the All Merciful is worshipped, and through which Paradise is won. When you hear talk about someone's religious qualities (*husn hal*), consider the quality of his *'aql* (husn 'aqlihi), for he will be rewarded according to his *'aqr'* (Usul, vol. 1, p. 13). (Regarding the translation of *husn hâl* by "religious quality," see the other tradition of the Prophet reported by Ja'far (al-Kulaynî, Usul, vol. 1, p. 31): "When you see someone who says a lot of prayers and fasts several times [a year], do not admire him; first consider his *'aql*.").

[46] The Quran lists "*munafaqun*" hypocrites as those who conceal what is in their hearts, in order to undermine the Islamic community. "Those who are hypocrites have no qualms in committing atrocities". The Quran has many *ayas* dedicated to hypocrites, the three most cited are: Hypocrisy towards God regarding actual faith. Hypocrisy towards the tenets of faith: for example, somebody may believe in God, Judgment Day, accounting, scales of deeds and Hellfire (with uncertainty and doubt) but not fear them at all (in actual) or not refrain from committing sins because of them. Yet he claims, "I fear God." "Hypocrisy towards others: somebody is double-faced and double-tongued. He praises someone in their presence, then, behind their back, he denounces them and tries to cause them pain and harm them." (Q2:8) and (Q2:14)

Mosa insists that those who seek *faal* and *sihr* must be individuals who are able to use their *aql*. In fact, she says these particular types of clients [those who lack *aql*] are the reason why *faal* is considered *haram*. She asserts,

> They do not remember Allah; they have no faith (*maku eman*). They worship *faal*, and demand their desires fulfilled; they are slaves to their passions. They take everything the *dasha* says as infallible truth. They do not take what they have learned and strategize; think about what actions and words they should adopt or avoid in certain situation to accomplish their objectives. When I try to tell them not to worry, that things may change. They say, "no I need to know for certain". So stupid, only Allah knows what is certain.

In Mosa's first example, she depicted a Muslim obsessed with prayer, an act characterized by an absence of *aql*, and in turn, an absence of proper modes of piety. The second example is one of a Muslim who does not use their *aql* to remember Allah, to connect to Allah in everyday life, as they lack faith by imprisoning themselves in the passions of everyday life (*nafs*).

In this formulation, Mosa is stipulating that one is not simply a Muslim, one must be Muslim through action. Talal Asad's notion of apt performance sheds light on Mosa's description, as he argues that Muslim-ness is bound by constant actualizing and enacting Islamic ethics and practices. Therefore, Muslims engage in repetitive performance in relation to a set of principles whose objectives and forms are not predetermined but immanent to apt performance (1986:15). Drawing on textual Islamic principles, Mosa critiques normative discourses on *faal*, and uses the technology to assert agency, while simultaneously delimits her agency through her simultaneous adherence to statist Islamic norms. Through Mosa's particular configuration of *aql*, *faal* becomes both a source and limitation of knowledge; it cannot always provide the knowledge that is sought, but the knowledge that is required. It becomes resignified as a method of "*tanbeeh*"

cautioning and ethically guiding clients to a more pious and fulfilling life. It is through the interplay of repetition, deviation and reassertion of *faal* into hegemonic Islam that *faal* maintains legibility as legitimate. The resignification of faal as *tanbeeh*, and thus, as rooted in state Islam, is not simply confined to Mosa, for her clients, and Mosa's friends whom she learned *dasha* from, and those she advises further entrench *faal* into its new configuration.

Faal

Tanbeeh is situated within the dynamic architecture of personal circumstances, fate, free-will, intentionality and temporality. In this section, against the backdrop of contemporary Kuwaiti life and its dilemmas, I explicate how divine knowledge is deployed through Islamic notions of fate (*qadar* and *nasib*) free-will *(mukayar(a))* and intentionality (*niyya*). These notions are organized through multiple temporalities which create an implicit template for the indeterminate imagination. In other words, the imagination through *faal* technology works through processual constructions of narratives organized through Islamic understanding of temporality. The organization of temporality enables an array of outcomes such as tension, hope, acceptance, strategy and meaning that can be both created and enacted.

Clients and Their Sessions

During my fieldwork, I observed clients coming for general guidance or insight into their life. Others come with specific questions and issues related to work, family, illness, supernatural illness (evil eye – *a'yn harra*, magic - *sihr*), related to education, legalities, and love. Clients came from different echelons of Kuwaiti society. Kuwait society's class system is organized in a genealogical hierarchy, with the earliest settlers stationed at the peak, commonly referred to as "the originals" or "authentic" (*asil*) and naturalized citizens (*mitjanis(a)*) positioned, more generally, in the lower rungs of Kuwaiti society. Mosa's clients were predominantly from the

middle-class to upper-middle class. The diviners that clients visit often reflect their socio-economic backgrounds. While some diviners, located closer to the capital command huge sums, other charge only a fraction of the amount and are usually located in isolated neighborhoods close to the Saudi or Iraqi border. Some clients visit diviners frequently (two to four times a month), while others only visit when they have an issue at hand. Clients seek diviners for three main reasons: anonymity, a detached perspective (diviners are removed from client's everyday life), and skill in understanding the client. Mosa's *faal* sessions were always conducted in privacy, in either the diviner's home or the clients. The session almost always begins with the offering of sweets, juice, coffee or tea, and water in Mosa's living room. These offerings are both a product of Arab hospitality, and a means through which social relations are facilitated.

The beginning of the session and the sharing of food and tea is in contradistinction to the end of the session, when money is exchanged, and the relationship largely ceases to exist (Mankova 2004). In all of the sessions I observed, the diviner never explicitly asked for their compensation; nearing the end or after the session, the client would silently pay the diviner by placing twenty dinars on the floor (where they sat) beside the diviner accompanied by a simple "thank you".[47] The exchange of money was significant because *faal* is often practiced amongst groups of women familiar with one another, as a form of entertainment. However, the anonymity and the exchange of money changes the dynamic and adds legitimacy to the practice. Of course, one can purchase entertainment, and perhaps for some of the clients it is a form of entertainment, but for many others it is something more, as I will discuss below.

Before beginning a *faal* session Mosa always asked for the client's mother's name, and the names (and mother's names) of others the client wanted to inquire about. According to

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[47] It was rarely the case that the client did not know the price, usually, the client was referred to the diviner by another client and came with the exact amount of cash.

Mosa's cosmological understanding, unlike the material (Arab) world, where a person is identified by their patrilineal descent, in the spiritual world, a person is identified as the son or daughter of their mother's given name.[48] This locates the client's position, it fixes their identity which is transposed into the *dasha*. For this to be achieved, Mosa strews the *dasha*, and identifies several cowrie shells which signify people, and she begins to read the symbols placed around them. She gives descriptions of personality, biographical details and present context. When the client identifies with the description, this is the shell she uses for the client. Mosa whispers the clients name, and their mothers name on the shell (x daughter of y), and places it back into the *dasha*, the diviner first gives insight while the client stays quiet, after which, the session opens up for the client's questions.

Aside from my presence, it was usually only the diviner and client present (occasionally, the client brought a friend or relative whom they trusted).[49] Some of Mosa's clients did not want me to be present during their sessions; Mosa explained that to read someone's *faal* was to read their most private thoughts, desires, and actions, as such clients required sessions to be free from judgement or potential gossip. And thus, my presence as a fellow Kuwaiti woman was not welcomed. On the other hand, many other clients permitted my presence, and we would often socialize before and after the sessions, particularly if they were regular clients. The only rule Mosa imposed was that I should not speak during the session, she did not want me to distract the session.

There was very little professionalization in Mosa's practices, there was no organization, standardization, scheduling, or planning of any sorts. The session's duration would range anywhere between fifteen minutes to three hours. The duration was contingent upon many

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[48] In the cases that the client was to inquire about an individual whose mother's name is unknown, they substitute the mothers name with "*Huwa*" (Eve) the primordial mother.

[49] Sometimes, the trusted friend or relative waited in the living room.

factors, the severity of the client's issue, whether Mosa or the client had other tasks or clients, and whether Mosa and the client synchronized well on an emotional/social level. Although, Mosa did not schedule appointments weeks (or even a week) ahead of time, she usually schedules sessions on the same day, or for the following day. It would not be an exaggeration to say Mosa did not believe in scheduling (in any form), and in particular, for *faal*, she often turned down appointments because she, "wasn't in the mood," and when she was "in the mood", she would call her favorite clients and ask if they still wanted a session.[50] I observed that when she wasn't in the mood for *faal* it coincided with a general preoccupation with negative and positive event in her life, it was the everyday mundaneness that called for *faal*.

In order to understand how *faal* was used to produce knowledge, I analyzed the sessions I observed, and I carved out three types of questions, the first includes questions pertaining to options (what is best?); the second are instructive questions (what should I do?). These two questions are usually pragmatic means of minimizing uncertainty and risk, where I take uncertainty to mean temporal unknowing, and risk as the reduction of loss (i.e., to avoid certain events or scenarios or take specific actions that results in avoiding loss) (Beerden 2013). Type one and two questions are open-ended questions, they leave space open for chance while working through contingency (when applicable). The third-category questions are analogous to a diagnosis and entail an explanation (Why did this happen, which can often be restated into what went wrong?).[51]

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[50] During the four weeks I lived with her, Mosa turned down 13 clients, totaling $1300 USD. She only called back five of those clients. I asked about the rest, to which she responded, if it's important they will call back." I also noticed a general disregard for planning, because when I would ask her about prospective client sessions, what she had planned for tomorrow, or if she wanted to do a particular activity the following week, she would respond with, "you're problem is that you live in the future, think about today, not tomorrow," sometimes a more dire version, "we don't know if we're going to wake up tomorrow (live) and you're asking me about next week" an interesting attitude for a diviner. It is an attitude I return to in the third chapter.

[51] I have never seen a client ask a diviner to explain a positive event or situation.

Free-will and Fate

Lulwa, a 31-year-old Kuwaiti woman, had had her first session during my first week living with Mosa. Initially, Lulwa only sought to inquire about her work situation. She worked in corporate finance and wanted to know if she could prosper in her current employment, or whether promotions would inevitably be given to socially well-connected individuals instead, individuals with a *wasta*. *Wasta* is a pervasive concept in Kuwait defined as an intermediary or connection with higher administrators, or more generally, individuals with power and authority, who, like magic, can make things happen.[52] During Lulwa's second, fairly rushed session, as she had a salon appointment for which she was running late, she had an entirely different focus. After briefly catching up for a few minutes, Mosa jumped into the reading first making general statements that also functioned as questions before she delved into the specifics.

"Your sister, you haven't spoken to her in a while?" Mosa asked.

"No, we have not."

"I see that there has been conflict between you two. She is very loud and argumentative, ignore her. She holds grudges and becomes resentful, whereas you are able to let it go. Ignore her, and she will calm down. It is not about you, it is simply about how she is feeling, consumed by her emotion, no *aql* in that one".

Lulwa did not comment much on the issue with her sister, but short on time, she promptly shifted to the reason of her visit and told Mosa she wanted to know about a particular man she had recently met. Mosa added this man to her *dasha*, and read the arrangement the pieces landed in, "He has a strong personality, very proud, like a lion. There is *nasib* (destiny) between you two. But not now. If you married now, it would be to your

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[52]The nation of Kuwait is structured through hierarchies in which each family is based in. Family status is translated into socioeconomics. And yet, through *wasta*, one is able to cut across and navigate hierarchies through connections. Thus, in Kuwait power circulates through the form of *wasta*. This is a point I return to in chapter two.

detriment. You have yet to cultivate the knowledge and tools to understand how to deal

with him. You must learn to how to interact with people better. Also, keep your personal

issues to yourself. Do not tell this man all of your secrets. If something does not harm or

benefit him, then do not reveal it. You create the dynamic with him by your actions and

reaction, keep that in mind.

Lulwa then asked, "so you don't think he is a good match for me?"

"No, he is, his *niyya* (intention) is good, and so is yours, that's why there is *nasib*

between you. But not yet. Your personalities are not yet compatible. Allah does not work

on your time"

"But, in the future you see that there is marriage"

"I see there is *nasib*, but it depends. If your personalities do not settle, maybe his *niyya*

for you will change. If it does not happen, then it is for the best. Every delay has its

blessing (*kil takheyra feeha keyra*)".

From this session we can understand a number of factors, first of which, is the authority with

which Mosa speaks. Lulwa does not understand Mosa's reading as mere insight, but she

understood the words Mosa articulated as describing her reality. More precisely, Lulwa

understood Mosa as the medium through which God's words worked through. These words were

"breathed" into Mosa from "Elsewhere" (Mittermaier 2011). It is not a matter of what Mosa

inherently knows, but what she can see, what she has privileged access to. It is access to the

divine that gives Mosa her aura of authority as an arbiter of reality.

Secondly, Lulwa asked Mosa whether or not her suitor is good for her, and the possibility of

marriage, in doing so, she reveals her concerns, and her anxieties. Furthermore, Mosa's answer

gives Lulwa hope for the future – it opens the door for possibility, but it also tempers and gives

order to her present. Although her future remains ambiguous, her present is ordered, managed, wherein the management of uncertainty correlates with the management of emotions. Mosa is orienting Lulwa towards patience, purpose and meaning in her present life, and not the future, for Lulwa's future is still in a state of becoming. This point is bolstered through Mosa's use of the Islamic concepts of *nasib*, *niyya* and her reference to a divine time. These concepts enable Mosa to abstain from foreclosing on a future outcome, leaving the door to the future indeterminate that is contingent upon the present. In Andras Zempleni's study of Senufo divination, he has shown how divination, through contingency and chance, reveals cultural modes of thinking and understanding relationships of causality (1994). This is evident in Mosa's practice of *faal*, as it is rooted in her cosmological understanding of time, action, and intention. [53] How do these concepts intersect and unfold? The word "*nasib*", literally translates into "share" that has come to mean, "share in one's life". You can have more than one *nasib*, for not all *nasibs* are actualized: they are possibilities that one's reality, and more significantly, that God allows for. To better understand the connections between action, *nasib*, *qadar* (theologically understood as predestination) and *niyya* (intentionality), I will give an example provided by Mosa:

> "*Nasib* is very simple, for example, if two different men offer you marriage proposals, both are defined as your *nasib*, that is, possibilities. But you ultimately choose which man you want to marry. You are a person of will, not completely determined by fate (*insana mukhayara mu musayara*). But even your *qadar* can change. You know, it is said that one man approached the *Nabi* Musa (Prophet Moses), whose *qadar* was characterized by a

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[53]I define these terms in relation to their deployment during my fieldwork. Other scholars have defined and understood the terms in accordance to the particularity of their context. In Luca Nevola's article, 'Destiny in Hindsight' (2017), he defines *qadar* (realm of potential) and *nasib* (the actualization of that potential). While conducting interviews, he observes that when Yemenis are prompted to discuss their lives, they become involved in a form of cultural self-reflection, often stating "no *nasib* occurred" both acknowledging human agency, and a melancholic resignation. He maintains, the use of the word *nasib*, is not necessarily fatalist in its deployment, but "an ex post facto the magic word that justifies failure" (2017: ?).

life of poverty, and he said the *Nabi*, "pray for me and my wife, we are very poor, we don't even have enough food to eat". The *Nabi* asked the man, "you don't want to live a life of poverty" and the man answered, "no, I don't. We are exhausted by the life we have". Allah then allowed them to live wealthy for seven years, they will be bestowed with great *rizq* (sustenance or provisions) but they will return to poverty after the seven years. The *Nabi* monitored them for seven years; he saw that for ten years they had significantly expanded their wealth and maintained it beyond seven years. The *Nabi* Musa was confused, so he prayed to Allah and asked, why He had not reverted the man and his family back to poverty. Allah gave *Nabi* Musa the answer, the *Nabi* said, they changed their *qadar*. When Allah opened the door for *rizq*, they did not live lavishly; they gave back to the people who remained living in poverty. They began to trade some of their newly acquired *rizq* and shared the profits with the impoverished, so they too could begin trading. Over time, the many people who began dependent upon them, slowly became economically independent. Because the man used his prosperity to help others become prosperous, they helped him in return to remain wealthy. He changed his *qadar* through his *niyya* and actions".

Mosa does not consider this story to be a real historical event; rather, she recounted the narrative as an ethical allegory. The significance of Mosa's religious anecdote is relevant not only in what it conveys about her practices, but also for what it communicates about her own religiosity and knowledge of scripture, and the way in which she navigates Islamic state discourses and sanctions. She is able to take the concept of *tanbeeh*, divine guidance, and expand on it through Islamic concepts that further entrench her practices within the textual Islamic tradition.

This story does not merely explain the function of *qadar* and *nasib*, but it serves as a template for modes of behavior, Mosa's economy of morality, or apt performance. The interplay of intentionality, action, *nasib* and *qadar* are constantly rearticulated, rendering one's life trajectory malleable. In Mosa's world, these terms are not static; she oscillates from indeterminate to determinate realms of existence, for the terms and constituents of destiny are porous and mutable.[54] It is a both an ethical and hopeful technology, where spaces of indeterminacy can be salvaged through morality enacted through intentionality and action.

If we return to Lulwa's session, Mosa could see the conflict and outcome between Lulwa and her sister, but she could not see if Lulwa and her suitor's marriage would be realized, it was contingent upon their future actions (free will). Mosa also establishes *nasib* between Lulwa and her suitor because they both possessed virtuous *niyyas* which undergirds the *nasib* between them, but their compatibility had yet to be established. However, Mosa also cautions her, gives her advice on the present, specifically how actions in the present give rise to alternative futures—for the better or the worse. The relationship between *niyya*, *nasib*, action, and *qadar* are organized through a more complex temporal framework that is incommensurate to the notions of the past, present and the future. Mosa references these different temporal frameworks, for she states, "Allah does not work on your time" and "every delay has its blessing" thereby implying a subjective time that is particular to a person's desire and patience, and transcendental time, the "right" time for one to receive their *nasib*. Thus, *nasib* on the one hand operates through time, the right time as decreed by Allah, and on the other hand, through the actions and intentions of a person. The tension between transcendental time and subjective time encapsulates the tension between free will and fate. This tension was further elaborated on in another session.

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[54] In Islamic theology, *Qadar* literally means power, but usually signifies divine destiny or fate. It is what one is meant to have, it is not an option; it is decreed by God (Nevola 2018).

Hessa, a 26-year-old woman made an appointment, she wanted advice on whether she should marry a man who had recently proposed to her, and about a company she was in the midst of opening. After consulting with the *dasha*, Mosa said, "I do not see *nasib* between you and this man. I don't think the marriage will happen". Hessa looked distraught, "why, his family already spoke to mine, everything has been confirmed". To which, Mosa said,

> I'm just telling you what I see. And I see something will occur unexpectedly that will break the engagement, and the marriage will not materialize. I'm sorry, but I see someone much better for you. You and this future man will have *nasib*, and you will know it's him because he will have a mark on his face. Not now, or next year, but not ten years either; maybe between two and five years."

Mosa's reading revealed a third condition of time when she provided Hessa with a marker to recognize her *nasib*; a sign contextualized through a timeframe. If Hessa had spotted a man with a mole that same week, it would not have been recognized as a sign of marriage, and thus, one can adduce that time influences the meaning of a sign (a man with a mark on his face).[55] Moreover, Hessa's disappointing news was mediated through a hopeful prospect, and so, she moved onto her second concern, Hessa did not ask a general question about the company she was opening (will my business be successful?) but asked concrete questions about which brands to use, which location she should pick, which suppliers to use, what to avoid, product pricing, etc. In this case, even more forcefully than Lulwa's, Hessa's session was oriented towards the present as much as it was for the future. For Hessa, asking concrete question and listening to Mosa's answers served to give her confidence in her decision making. Despite Mosa's divinely

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[55] Kim Beerben notes that in ancient Rome, the character of the day on which a particular sign was observed could affect its meaning. Furthermore, the Roman calendar was dynamic: a day could even become negative if a particularly bad event or sign from the supernatural (or both) happened to occur. In this way, the appearance of signs affected the roman calendar: divination could also influence the flow of time (Beerban 2013; Michels 2015).

inspired guidance, *tanbeeh*, pertaining to Hessa's concrete question, Mosa left the answer of ultimate success indeterminate. Time had yet to formulate the outcome of Hessa's success, and thus, *nasib* had yet to instantiate itself. Here, Hessa was situated in the realm of indeterminacy, gradually shaped through Hessa's actions. And yet, Hessa's marriage *nasib* was already determined in Mosa's view. What happens when Mosa's definitive prediction turns out to be incorrect?

I asked Hessa how she felt about her reading, specifically, the possibility of a cancelled engagement, she responded that she had come to Mosa wanting to know what misfortune awaited her. "It allows me to mentally prepare myself, I don't want to form such high expectations, and invest my emotions only to be disappointed in the end. I want to know what will be good for me."[56] During another conversation, five weeks later, Hessa brought up the issue of *faal* veracity, and she explained that events did not always unfold as Mosa predicted. For example, her engagement did suffer a disruption in the way Mosa described, there was a conflict between the families—the groom's family was conservative and perceived Hessa as unsuitable for their family. Hessa said that in light of Mosa's reading she was anticipating some sort of chaotic event ending her engagement. She understood this conflict to be it, and so instead of enduring the back-and-forth disputes and negotiation between the families, she quickly cancelled the engagement. In a turn of events, her cancellation impelled the groom to plead with her to change her mind. Hessa proposed an extended engagement, so that she could spend more time with her potential husband and his family. Here, Hessa did not view Mosa as a charlatan, but

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[56] Echoing my cousin's hesitations and resignations, other women I spoke to said they avoided *faal* readings precisely because it profoundly influenced their reality. If a woman learned that someone was not good for her, or that she would soon hear bad news, she would become fixated on the idea. She would begin to consider different possibilities and adjust her behavior to those around her. This is how strong the suggestion of words is, in that they recreate people's perspective, and for some this recreation is negative. In short, it can create paranoia, which has been acknowledged in the literature on divination (Fisiy et al 2001; Turner 1979; Myhre 2006).

understood the outcome of her engagement as inadvertently provoked by Mosa's reading. Hessa felt that because she went to Mosa, and changed the course of her actions, she avoided the possible future events that were predicted for her. Such that, her intentionality (*niyya*) and actions reformed her *nasib*. This example once again exemplifies how Islamic emic categories used in faal render destiny as emergent through context, where each individual's subjective context is influx, contingent upon present actions that shape future outcomes.

Due to the fact that notions of intentionality and *nasib* are organized through multiple and intersecting temporalities, they create a template for a "surplus of meaning" (Ricoeur 1969), here defined as an input not given or experienced but rather aimed at, and thus, continuously manipulated and re-enacted in numerous contexts (Ricoeur 1969: 167-169; Taminain 2001:89-91). The dynamic nature of *faal* temporalities, combined with what Mosa conceptualizes as *tanbeeh,* constructs amorphous and indeterminate signs. For Hessa, Mosa's *tanbeeh* gave her a foundational reality that she could draw on in different contexts to re-order and re-conceptualize her present. In this way, the technologies of *faal* serve to reconstitute Mosa and the client's imagination, as *faal* becomes a vehicle that impels individuals into a wider world of meaning and lived experience (Mittermaier 2010). In the context of Mosa, it becomes a tool through which she can engage in self-making, to engage in piety through her status as a diviner and helping others. Mosa is not alone in constructing her position as a diviner, both discursively and in practice, her clients, and even my own presence serve to constitute a shared world in which her position is repetitively consolidated.

Furthermore, Mosa draws on pre-existing perspectives of *faal* in a way that discursively positions her practices as rooted within the Islamic tradition and against Kuwaiti statist norms, thereby taking the demonized practice of *faal* and resignifying *it* within the bounds of legitimacy.

This resignification does not merely serve to legitimize Mosa's practices, but it legitimizes Mosa herself. Mosa's status becomes legible and legitimate to others as a status of authority that is both normative, and concomitantly, surpasses norms. This status is consistently rearticulated through Mosa's *faal* and jinn performances which serve to reconstitute her ritual status. The sessions are performative, as well as affectively charged, ethical and idiosyncratic form of guidance.

In this chapter I named three types of question that *faal* sessions included but I only gave examples of two (instructive and minimizing uncertainty), neglecting the third category of questions (diagnostic). In this next chapter, I discuss the third category of questions in relation to the solutions it calls for, *sihr*. I examine the logics behind *sihr*, the purpose for which it is used, and the practices themselves as embedded within Kuwaiti socio-cultural dynamics.

Chapter Two:
The Circulation of Power

In this chapter, I examine *sihr* practices as technologies of the imagination, by this I mean, material practices that produce effects. I seek to analyze the implications of these technologies as situated within the participants' wider social contexts. Bruce Kapferer (1991) states, "magic" and "sorcery" are used by people to constitute themselves and their realities which often sheds light on cultural, historical and social factors, the human imagination, passion and suffering. I draw on Kapferer, to conceptualize *sihr* as a form of agency and social process, bound up with relations of power in everyday life. To put it more forcefully, *sihr* is a reflection of and reaction to power dynamics that manifest within the everyday. Focusing on everyday life, I specifically examine the relation between *sihr* and four locally significant factors, state Islam, marriage, bureaucracy, and money. Lastly, this chapter takes the form of three parts: Mosa's own *sihr* experiences and how they have affected her; the relationship between *wasta* (social connections) and *sihr;* and how *sihr* operates. While I observed two forms of *sihr*, the first for healing purposes or restitution and the other entails influencing or manipulating people or events for a specific (different) desired outcome, in this thesis, I only focus on the latter form. I further observed that the majority of clients only purchased *faal*, and it was quite a small percentage that requested *sihr*. In these cases, the *faal* sessions lead to *sihr* through the diviner's diagnosis of a problem. The problem is not necessarily one of supernatural origin, but often related to relationships, or lack thereof, as well as employment, and money. Other times, if a client had no recourse to a dilemma he or she was confronted with, they requested *sihr*.

    I met two other diviners and *sihr* practitioners through Mosa named Ameena and Huda. Ameena was a 55-year-old, widowed Kuwaiti woman from a Jordanian background, while Huda was a 32-year-old married Kuwaiti woman. They would sometimes gather and read *faal* for each

other, since it was an established rule that no diviner can conduct *faal* or *sihr* for themselves. I joined the women in a group context as well as spoke to them individually over the course of four months. Reiterating Nabokov's insight, although each woman had her own distinctive calling and idiosyncratic approach to the practices (private), they shared many commonalities (public). For example, there were many rules *sihr* practitioners stipulated that defined when *sihr* could be conducted, for whom, and for what price, which I will discuss below. According to these women, *sihr* was only conducted on specific days, and during specific times. *Sihr* was not for just anyone, Ameena took the initiative to explain, "there must already be *nasib* for the task, event, or person the client wants but is facing a lot of obstacles or difficulties." Mosa added, "*sihr* expedites the inevitable." The practitioners agreed that if *sihr* was requested for a task deemed outside the scope *nasib*, the client must be refused. During my stay with Mosa, she only offered it to one client, and turned down two others deeming their intention inadequate. Like *faal*, discourses around *sihr* served to resignify it, to sever it from its normative understanding as something harmful and as rooted in a power other than God (idolatry) and into a practice that assists or remedies through God. It is on the basis that *sihr* causes harm and is viewed as idolatrous that it is understood as *haram*.

Another agreement amongst the women is the number of clients they could take for *sihr*. Ameena only work with one client at a time and has a wait list of clients she works from. Huda and Mosa take on more than one client at a time, but never more than three. The first reason is that *sihr* is a commitment; it requires preparation, focus, and significant energy. The women indicated that sessions are personal, and to give each client the necessary care it is imperative not spread one's energy too thin. Although, for some practitioners, the client's presence is not necessary for *sihr* to be conducted. For example, Huda had a client named Dana she worked with

for three years, during two of which Huda had lived in Egypt with her husband while he was in Law school. Dana had initially requested "*shi'ra*" a form of *sihr* that renders one alluring and attractive to onlookers. The issue is that *sihr* is temporary, it must be renewed (*itjadid*) after a specific time period. When Huda moved to Egypt, she periodically renewed dana's *shi'ra* for her while Dana remained in Kuwait.

Wasta/ Sihr

Employment and monetary issues were two frequent problems people sought *sihr* to remedy. More specifically, to obtain a better position, opening a new business, to give life to a failing business, to influence others, to resolve conflicts, and to attract powerful people to aid the client in their business endeavors. One of Mosa's clients, Khaled, even purchases *sihr* to aid his navigation of the Kuwaiti bureaucratic maze and its obstructions. All of these dilemmas involve the absence of social connections, a mediator, or some sort of "short cut" to achievement. All of these dilemmas could be resolved through the practice of *wasta*. The absence of *wasta* necessitates alterative channels, where *sihr* becomes the *wasta* of the poorly connected, which in Kuwait is synonymous with the poor. In Kuwait power circulates through the form of *wasta*, often translated as "mediation". A common saying in Kuwait, is "*wasta* is above the law" (*al wasta a'ala min al qanoon*); it is an established social fact that Kuwaiti regulation is the system of *wasta* and not the law. Etymologically the term "*wasta*" derives from the Arabic word "*yatwassat*" which means "steering towards the middle" (Ramady et al. 2016). Before the emergence of the nation-state, *wasta* was a means of dispute resolutions by a mediator, and an exercise of trust building among and in between Arab tribes (Cunningham and Sarayrah 1993; Al Rahami 2008; Hutchings and Weir 2006).

In 1946, the advent of the bureaucracy in Kuwait, propelled by the discovery of petroleum reconfigured power, identity, and with it *wasta* practices. *Wasta* was institutionalized in three interconnected ways: politically and economically, through citizenship, and access to state subsidies (Gonzales 2014; Al-Nakib 2014). In 1959, two years before independence from the British, Kuwait promulgated citizenship laws, where the state organized and categorized people based on genealogical precedence: the citizenship laws of 1959 conferred citizenship to those who could prove male ancestry from 1920 or earlier.[57] The nationality law stratifies citizenship into eight distinct articles.[58] Full political rights are only awarded to those who acquire nationality under Article one, the so-called "original Kuwaitis" the merchant families (*asil*), which linguistically and legally produce a class of "indigenous" Kuwaitis.[59] This hierarchical system of citizenship reflects both a ranking system of status and belonging (Ramady et al. 2016).[60] This becomes clearer when reflecting on the Arabic word for nationality, "*jinsiyya*", which derives from the root word *jins* that translates into kind, sort, variety, species, class, and genus. Thus, a Kuwaiti with a *jinsiya* one is considered more Kuwaiti as implied by the rights and privileges that their legal category entails than someone with a *jinsiya* four. This has considerable implications, as citizenship articles are intricately tied to political

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[57] Processes of state building also necessitated labour needed to fill the newly created bureaucratic positions was procured from neighboring regions, predominantly nomadic tribes from Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Iraq (Al Omar 1997; Nakib 2015). Naturalization of Bedouin and Iranian peoples also served as a strategy of "allies-building" to decrease the ruling family's reliance on merchant family support (ibid). For an in-depth analysis of processes of naturalization see (Nakib 2015; Omar 1997; Crystal 1989)

[58] These categories have changed. For an analysis of citizenship articles before 2010 see (Oskay 2010). This is an unofficial English translation of the nationality laws https://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6b4ef1c.html. This is the official version in Arabic: http://www.gcc-legal.org/LawAsPDF.aspx?country=1&LawID=2694.

[59] Under article 13 within the nationality act, citizenship articles 3, 4, 5, 7 or 8 may be revoked if the an individual is convicted of any honour related crime or honesty-related crime (undefined), or naturalized person has disseminated opinions which may tend seriously to undermine the economic or social structure of the State or that he is a member of a political association of a foreign State. Kuwaiti nationality which has been acquired by any dependent of any such person may also be revoked. https://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6b4ef1c.html

[60]Legal hierarchies in Kuwait extend beyond citizens, as the categories of foreign labourers, domestic migrant workers and *bidoon* (stateless) each constitute a distinct legal category with distinct regulations.

enfranchisement, access to welfare provisions and economic opportunities, where citizenship is

used to justify and legitimize unequal allocation of political inclusion and economic benefit.[61]

The state hierarchy established through *jinsiyya* articles is reproduced through discourses

(original Kuwaiti), legal practices (citizenship categories) and through the practice of *wasta*,

where citizenship rubrics relate to changes in *wasta* accessibility. Thus, unlike Benedict

Anderson notion of an "imagined community" that entails equal membership of brotherhood,

Kuwait's legal infrastructure institutionalized an internally stratified administrative statuses

rather than any particular ethnicity, tribe or religion.[62]

In the last thirty years, scholars have largely characterized *wasta* as a form of

neopatrimonialism in the MENA region (Blaydes 2008; Valbjørn & Bank 2010; Ritcher 2007;

Pawelka 2002). *Wasta* here is a hierarchical upwards system predicated on cultural capital of

lineage, name, and substantial connection (Osella & Osella 2011). In short, *wasta* under the state

was reformulated as a stable structure preserving the power of the elite. The power of *wasta*

through the right connections, like magic, can materialize almost any political or economic

outcome. People from lower-socio-economic spheres must navigate the hierarchical strictures of

Kuwait with limited and often fickle connections. For Khaled, and many clients, *sihr* functions

as a kind of *wasta* for *wasta*. In this context, when clients cannot access *wasta* circuits of power,

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[61] As I mentioned, naturalized citizens are restricted in Kuwait's already limited political participation in that they are not permitted to vote or run for office for the first 30 years as Kuwaiti nationals (Nakib 2014). Kuwaiti's political participation is limited to the national assembly elections.

[62] Tribe, sect, and other forms of solidarities were dismantled into the breaking down of groups of people into nuclear families, which were then organized into citizenship categories that were linked to space, and access to resources. The anthropologist Anh Nga Longva has shown how Kuwaiti family/tribal names are now symbolically marked in different ways, in a manner that adheres to Kuwaiti organization of identity (2006). For example, where many tribes once identified by their lineage names, this is no longer the case. Many families use the name of their first ancestor that arrived in Kuwait.[62] This shows a shift in identification and loyalty from tribe/sect to nation, deftly staged and managed by the state (2006:8).

they instead seek recourse through *sihr*, wherein the diviner is able to tap into a different order of power, the circuits of divine power.

Marriage (*Zawaj*)

Issues with social relations remain a theme amongst the most common uses for *sihr*, which predominantly pertain to marriage, or marriage-related issues. *Sihr* for the purpose of marriage is also the most expensive form of *sihr*, as well as the most pervasive, Mosa herself has used *sihr* for marriage. In order to understand why this is the case, it is relevant to contextualize marriage against the backdrop of the socioeconomic-political Kuwaiti landscape. In the context of Kuwait, patterns and trends in marriage have undergone recent transformations. First, it is important to define marriage in the concerning context analyzed, as noted by Al Nesef et al.:

> The normative system supporting the family is so deeply ingrained, so linked with traditions and sentiments that the basic features of the family are taken for granted and treated as sacred. The family is the unit in which reproduction is authorized and expected.... Marriage and fertility are, therefore, viewed as sequential in the life cycles of women (2000: 83).

Marriage is also associated with socio-economic security and socio-historical values pertaining to tribal genealogy. Thus, historically, marriages have been cousin marriages (Kandari et al 2002; Al Kandari & Crews 2010; Radovanovic 1999; Al Awadi 1986).[63] Today, cousin marriages are declining, but still numerically significant (ibid). Three main developments are attributed to this shift, one is the consequence of the re-definition of who constitutes a Kuwaiti

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[63] There is extensive research on the phenomena on "father's brother's daughter" and how this marriage pattern is a form of inheritance (Chelhod 1965; Patai 1965; Peters 1968; Tapper 1992), honour and shame (Pitt-Rivers 1977; Tapper 1978 &1992; Schneider 1971; Davis 1977). In the contemporary context, it is suggested that many families that continue to practice consanguineous marriages and have high fertility rates because of a desire to enlarge the tribe for sociopolitical gains (Shah 2004).

national that occurred in 1989, an increase in women's education, and work participation (McDonald, 1985; Al-Thakeb 1985; Shah 2004).[64]

Moreover, there are several other factors that have placed considerable constraints on marriage possibilities for Kuwaiti women. First, there are numerically more women than men in Kuwait. Kuwaiti citizenship is also transmitted through patrilineal descent, which means that Kuwaiti women's children will always be categorized as foreign to Kuwait. This is significant, because the practice of permanent residency does not exist in Kuwait, and thus, foreigner's residency in Kuwait is indefinitely precarious; therefore, there is a preference among women to marry a Kuwaiti citizen. Furthermore, religious affiliation, ethnic and tribal backgrounds, and socio-economic status are all significant factors that are considered for a potential marriage to be approved by the respective families involved (Al-Mughni 2001; Shah 2004). Wealthy and well-connected women therefore have numerous opportunities for marriage, while women from fragmented families, lower socio-economic standing, or minority religious affiliations often have trouble finding marriage partners.[65]

Mosa's *Sihr* Experiences

After the collapse of Mosa's first engagement, she opted for spiritual aid from a diviner she was referred to by a friend. This diviner was a Moroccan woman living in Rabat, Morocco, and thus their communication and *faal* sessions were over the phone. The Moroccan diviner suggested Mosa carry what she called "*qabool*" a form of "*hijab*", which means "that which hides" a "veil"

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[64]Women who marry at an early age generally marry a cousin, thereby eliminating the search for a suitable marriage partner (Al-Thakeb 1985; Shah 2004). Whereas women whose marriage is delayed by university education and are employed in work environments where sexes are not segregated and thus able to meet men (ibid).

[65] There are some cases of "love-marriages" however, they are often constrained by the factors stipulated above. They are highly contingent upon the particularity of the family's context (Shah 2004). Marriage outside of familial approval may results in permanent fractions between the family (ibid). However, those who do not marry a member of the family and come from a lower socioeconomic status often suffer finding marriage suitors (Shah 2004). In fact, there is a "fairly consistent inverse association between socioeconomic characteristics and polygyny present" (Shah 2004: 171).

(which currently is the term used for women's headscarves) (Spadola 2014:72; Holy 1993:31). It is a "veil over the writing" that protects the potency of that which is written (ibid). "*Qabool*" is the Arabic word for acceptance, the objective of a *qabool* is for the carrier to be accepted, liked and desired; more specifically, it renders the carrier a magnet for potential suitors. The diviner writes specific letters, words, or phrases and folds the paper until it reaches the maximum number of possible folds. The tightly folded paper is then placed in a tiny silk pouch, after which the silk pouch can be carried in a purse, wallet or sewn into clothing. The diviner sent Mosa the *qabool* through Aramex, and Mosa paid her through Western Union.

Afterwards, Mosa explained that she carried the *qabool* for about a month when she had met and developed a relationship with a man, Faisal, whom she met at work. She had married this man via *mu'taa* (Shi'a temporary marriage) despite his Sunni status so that their relationship could be considered *halal* (Islamically permitted).[66] Mosa concluded that a *mut'aa* marriage with a Sunni man was not problematic because Sunni Islam employs an analogous practice, a marriage called "*zawaj misyar*" or "ambulant marriage" (Arabi 2001:147).[67] She adds that companionship is a necessity and she did not want to go about it in a non-*halal* manner.[68] Mosa's *muta'a* husband also helped her with minor expenses, bureaucratic aid, and help with everyday

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[66] *Mut'aa* marriage, popularly known as *sigheh* In Iran, is the Shi'a practice of temporary marriage. It is as valid form of marriage in Shi'a Islam that entails a private contract (verbal or written) (Haeri 2014; Rashad et al 2005). The duration of the marriage and the *mahar* (bride wealth) must be specified and agreed upon in advance (ibid).

[67] When I asked Mosa about *zawaj misyar*, she understood the practice as deriving from the prophet's lifetime, essentially synonymous with *mu'taa* marriage, a parallel that served to legitimize her cross-sect temporary marriage. Mosa is not alone, for *Misyar* marriage is oftentimes considered a derivative of *mut'aa* marriage, the former defined as a "travelling marriage" and the latter a "temporary marriage" (Nasir 2009). According to Shirine Jurdi, *misyar* marriage emerged in 1985 in Saudi Arabia that has since become a wide spread practice in Egypt and the Gulf (2001). Some scholars describe *ziwaj misyar* as a "strikingly novel configuration, where human sexuality, economic status, and polygamous culture come together to forge new legal knowledge" (Arabi 2001:148: Nasir 2009). Tofol Al Nasr argues that *misyar* marriages have specifically increased due to exorbitant expectations and costs of wedding spectacles, housing, children related expenses and other financial and social pressures (2011).

[68] Unconventional, but *halal* according to Mosa's understanding of *halal*. *Misyar* marriage shares the same critiques that *mut'aa* marriage is often subject to, "easy and temporary marriage" (Ibahrine 2008), a "no- strings marriage of convenience" (Ahmad 2009), "legal prostitution" (Jabarti 2005), and "sex tourism" (el-Gawhary 1995). Syed Ahmad (2009) who affirms that *misyar* marriage is "popular... in a society where extramarital [or] premarital sex is a cardinal sin [because] it legitimizes sexual relations outside the framework of conventional marriage".

tasks and chores (for example, taking her car to the shop). She did enjoy the financial aid, but it was the companionship, and the intimacy that she desired and emphasized.

Mosa's *muta'a* marriage was not what she desired for the long term; her objective was permanent marriage. She had called the Moroccan diviner and asked about the possibility of conducting *sihr* for the purpose of legally marrying her *muta'a* husband.[69] The Moroccan diviner had agreed to work with Mosa, on the condition that she must physically travel to Morocco for to begin the *sihr* rituals. She also asked Mosa to bring with her a list of specific materials that she needed to use as they were required ingredients for *sihr*. The Moroccan diviner asked for hair strands, from Mosa and her husband, a photograph of her husband, and an item of his clothing. Mosa further explained that she delivered the list of materials, paid her two thousand dinars, and waited for the results. I inquired about the *sihr* process; why was she required to physically be in the diviner's presence if she could have sent the ingredients through Aramex and paid the cost through a money transferring service as she had done before? Mosa explained that certain parts of the ritual required specific instruction that required her body, for example the diviner had given her a plastic bottle that the diviner had filled with enchanted water she had prepared for Mosa to bathe, after which the diviner would recite incantations while holding her hand.

Nearly one month after the rituals took place, Mosa attested to feeling a noticeable difference. She described the new *sihr*-induced dynamic with her husband as erratic. He became irritable and would initiate arguments over trivial matters, often leaving her as she tried to reason with him. And yet, he always returned to her after each conflict that he allegedly instigated. Mosa said the turning point was when he proposed to travel on holiday. The first day she described as perfect, he even suggested that they should move in together when they returned to

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[69] *Mut'aa* marriages are between individuals and do not take place in courts, although, they are legally valid in Shi'a family courts in Kuwait.

Kuwait, which she understood as a set closer to her objective of permanent marriage. But, her spirits sank, for they began to quarrel, and they spent the rest of their holiday separated. Mosa decided his inconsistent behavior was a marker of defective *sihr*. Mosa's account of *sihr* effects can be summarized as both cognitive and affective-embodied. She explained that *sihr* works through the mind and the body by instilling desires, shaping perspectives, and feeding thoughts to the *sihr* recipient. In Mosa's view, the *sihr* compelled Faisal to want to be with her, and yet, she reasoned that the faulty *sihr* must have created some sort of side-effect producing inconsistency.

She wanted some way to test her hypothesis, and so she decided to visit a local Bedouin diviner names Massouma. Mosa explained the situation to Massouma and asked her what she saw the problem to be and if there were any solutions. Massouma's reading informed Mosa that the *sihr* did not take because there was no *nasib* between them, it was not within God's decree. The best course of action would be to permanently leave the man, after which Mosa would meet her *nasib*. Massouma offered Mosa some context of this future meeting, it would take place on foreign soil, and that a married couple would introduce her to this man. After this reading, Mosa subsequently ended her relationship with Faisal, and five months afterwards, she met a man on foreign land, introduced to her by a married couple, and she drew on the "surplus of signification" narrated by Massouma to determine that this man was her *nasib*. Mosa said that she did marry this man, Ahmed, but the events that followed did not unfold in the way she had anticipated.

The marriage was a complicated one from the beginning, Ahmed was Sunni, and in an arranged marriage with his cousin whom he wanted to divorce but could not be due to familial obligations. Ahmed married Mosa on the condition that their marriage remain concealed from his

family. After a single year of marriage, Mosa and Ahmed divorced after a member of his family discovered him and Mosa together and proceeded to inform his first wife. Mosa expressed her acute disappointment as she was pregnant during this time. She did not understand how the marriage had ended before it had even really begun. She believed him to be her *nasib* and reasoned that it was not his own decision; a decision based on his emotions that ended the marriage, but his obligation to his family. She thought the situation profoundly unjust and decided to take action.

Mosa sought the guidance of a reputable diviner and *sihr* practitioner, and this is how she came to meet Ameena. She heard several clients and friends mention Ameena, her skill, her unavailability, and expensive cost. Even Massouma described Ameena as having especially "potent" *sihr*. Ameena's well known reputation, and the network of clients and practitioners from diverse backgrounds serves to illustrate the ways in which the ritualistic status of the diviner can spill outside of the private context and into specific social networks. The practitioners and clients from diverse ethnicities, religious sects, and socio-economic backgrounds never served as obstacle, the only criteria clients required was the reputation of the practitioner. The practitioner's ritual status is preserved outside of the private sphere through her reputation.

Sihr/ Du'a

Mosa specifically sought Ameena's aid for the purpose of reconciling with Ahmed. Unlike Mosa, Ameena did not use *faal* to assess the spiritual feasibility of *sihr* but instructed Mosa to read Surah Yusuf and wait three nights for a dream with Ahmed. She did not dream of Ahmed on the first night; while the second night she had a dream about a fiancé Mosa had when she was

18 years old, and finally; on the third night, she dreamt of Ahmed.[70] Mosa reported back to

Ameena, only to receive disappointing news. Ameena explained that dreaming of Ahmed in her

third dream meant that manifesting Ahmed through *sihr* would not be an easy task, but

nevertheless within the realm of possibility. Ameena suggested Mosa may consider targeting her

previous fiancé for *sihr*, as it would be easier to "bring him". Mosa decided against it, her

previous fiancé was already married with children, and she felt it unethical to break-up a family,

despite the presence of *nasib*. Over the next year, Mosa and Ameena performed *sihr* on Ahmed,

which did not result in marriage, but a cordial relationship as he became closely involved in his

son's life.

In Mosa's cosmological perspective, the outcome was a divine decree. In the same way

that *sihr* for Faisal was "defective" because there was no *nasib*, in this instance, she reasoned that

Ahmed entered her life as a transient *nasib*, for the purpose of bringing her son into the world.

She then made an interesting parallel, she explained the outcome of *sihr* through the concept of

du'a (recitation of the Qur'an for supplication).

> Reciting *du'a* for an objective does not always result in the reciter obtaining that
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> particular objective; analogously, performing *sihr* for a particular objective does not
>
> always result in the client obtaining that objective. Further, both practices can be invoked
>
> for unethical objectives (i.e., to hurt another), in both cases, the actor is held accountable
>
> for their actions whether God fulfills the appeal or not. In the Qur'an it says, it does not
>
> matter how much people pray, or how much they try to bewitch someone, if Allah does
>
> not allow it, it will never occur. Thus, we must submit to God's will. Perhaps, if Ahmed

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[70] This surah is chosen because of the specificity of its content: Yusuf is one of the sons of Ya'qub (known as Jacob in the English translation) who is imbued with the gift of interpreting dreams. The surah narratives Yusuf having a dream, which he recounts to his father, who immediately knows that his son Yusuf will be a prophet.

and I did reconcile, his wife would create some sort of spectacle. There is always a

purpose for why Allah will or will not grant someone's request in *du'a* or *sihr*, the issue

is we do not always know the reasons. Ultimately, submitting to Allah's will is an

example of strong faith in the face of affliction.

From Mosa's account we learned that she turned to *sihr* as a means of pragmatic action, an

attempt to reconcile with Ahmed or more generally, underscores the significance of marriage to

Mosa. Mosa relied on the language of *du'a* and state Islamic discourses to explicate *sihr,*

illustrating *sihr* cannot be understood without first understanding normative Islamic practices

and discourses. In this way, she is making an analogy between the two practices, describing both

as technologies through which one may assert agency in order to achieve an objective, wherein

agency manifests in the form of an appeal to God. Thus, for Mosa, both *du'a* and *sihr* are means

of divine intercession, and thus, carry devotional undertones.

When *sihr* and *du'a* do not produce the desired outcome, Mosa draws on two interrelated

points to demonstrate why: 1) God's will (as opposed to a person's) and 2) strong faith in the

face of affliction. These two points must be contextualized from the state Islamic discourses in

which they are embedded in, and in particular, how reality is conceptualized. The Islamic term

for social reality is "*al dunya*" which translates into the "temporal" or "lower" world, understood

as the diametric opposition of "*al-akhirah*" "everlasting life after death." To thoroughly

understand what is meant by *al dunya*, I borrow a Kuwaiti *ulema's* (Islamic scholar) description.

He states, if one dipped their finger into the ocean and then proceeds to remove it, the amount of

water that is reduced by the finger in comparison to the ocean is the significance of *al dunya*.

Which is to say, that one should not live for this world, for it is a conduit to the next, permanent

life (*al-akhirah*) (al-Najdi 2019). *Al dunya* is understood through the twin concepts of "*imtihan*"

(test) and "*ibtila*" (trial/affliction). *Al dunya* is temporary precisely because it is a test of faith (*imtihan*), in which tests will take the forms of trials/afflictions (*ibtila*). Through test and trail/affliction a Muslim's sincerity or claim to faith and of establishing spiritual rank in *al akhirah*, which is not commensurate to socio-economic rank (Hilmi et al 2016). Mosa tacitly draws on these Islamic discourses to firstly, acknowledge that God's will is not always knowable which may be experienced as a form of trial/affliction, and secondly, that one must maintain one's faith in the face of such affliction by accepting God's will.

This eschatological reasoning works on two intersected registers, where the outcome of *sihr*, understood as God's will enables Mosa to re-position herself within the collective order. The work of Ellen Corin elucidates this point, for she argues that possession rituals in Central Africa create "an element of individuation" (1979:334). Corin, however, nuances the concept of individuation, as not an "autonomous subject" but a "re-positioning within the collective order" (1979:330), in which the collective order is the system of signs and conventions that determine a given reality. In other words, the use of *sihr* enabled Mosa to reinsert herself within the collective order understood to be *al-dunya* through submitting to her circumstances thereby forgoing her desires as an enactment of piety, and thus, as devotion to God. Mosa forgoes desires of *al-dunya* while maintaining strong faith precisely because she is repositioned to live in relation to a different temporality, *al-akhirah*.[71]

The Language of *Sihr*

While *wasta* and marriage operate through social circulation, in what follows, drawing on the work of Katherine Lemons, I show how *sihr* operates through the circulation of powerful words.

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[71] One can make the argument that all Muslim pious acts are directed towards *al-akhirah*, which would be a conceivable claim. However, Muslims also live for *al-dunya*, and *sihr* is an example of this, to enact agency in order to materialize a desired objective. I am emphasizing moments of trials/afflictions that are understood as a test of faith, as opposed to an repetitive obligation (prayer, fasting, *zakat*). These are moments of suffering that require a drastic re-positioning, a profound shift in perspective and thus, emphasize the necessity of *al-akihra*.

The theme of powerful words was first introduced in conversations about *faal*. When Mosa spoke about the *dasha*, it was always in the form of personification. She referred to the *dasha* as "them" or "they" and took special care of the *dasha*, storing them in a velvet pouch; they were forbidden from entering a bathroom, nor could they be left on the floor while not in use. Mosa described the *dasha* as having preferences; they both like and dislike. She discovered (through trials) that they like *bukhoor* (incense), menstruation (Mosa says they are more effective when she is menstruating), which runs counter to dominant Salafi discourses about religious practice during menstruation. Mosa adds, the *dasha* also enjoy hashish and soft music, and Qur'anic recitation; while they dislike repetitive questions, and loud noise. She says, "they can turn on you" (*yagliboon a'alach*) by which she meant that when the client does not take them seriously (i.e., believe the wisdom they reveal), they no longer cooperate and offer *tanbeeh*.

Mosa learned how to create the *dasha* from her friend. First, she began by collecting shells, rocks, jewelry, charms, and even Lego pieces to assemble the signs and symbols she needed to represent people and aspects of their lives. When she had collected enough material, she began the processes of transforming the ordinary objects into spiritual tools by placing all the objects into a bowl and covers them in henna. She leaves them to marinate in the henna for seven days, each day playing Surah Yasin once so the *dasha* can hear and absorb the words.[72] After the *dasha* incorporate the holy words of Surah Yasin into itself, Mosa washes them and reads *ayat* al

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[72] The playing of surah Yasin is not a single occurrence but whenever she feels them (*dasha*) to be ineffectual, she goes through the process again. She says she does it approximately once every two years. Surah Yasin entails the everyday signs that must be understood as sign of God's existence and sovereignty, the night and day light are cosmological cycles of time that can only be controlled by God. It is a Surah both to establish God's sovereignty and the limitations of people and the need for people to recognize and understand signs and symbols to remain on the path of righteousness. Surah Yasin significance for this ritual is multiple. The Surah derives its name from the letter with which it begins with, the Arabic letters "ya" and "seen" which Mosa understands as signs containing truth yet to be deciphered. Mosa explains there a signs and symbols that are meant to be recognized and understood, and others whose meaning is revealed when they are meant to be revealed

Kursi 99 times to them.[73] While Mosa was explaining the power Qur'anic *ayat* are imbued with, she cited a Japanese experiment to illustrate the power of words, and specifically, the power of divinely ordained words. The experiment was by the scientist, Dr. Masaru Emoto who claimed that human consciousness and intention produced material effects. Mosa explained that while growing crystals, he repeated words like "love" and "caring" to some that produced beautifully symmetrical crystals, while unkind words produced distorted shapes.

Speech acts, the recitation of Qur'anic *ayat* in conjunction with actions in a ritualistic context mediate a transformation of the objects that constitute *dasha*. This point can be further elucidated by the work of Katherine Lemons. While studying Islamic healing in India, Lemons argues that the mufti's (Islamic jurists) healing practices produce speech acts in the form of metaphors. The mufti uses holy words that circulate through the body of the mufti, his enunciations and his breath, and on the bodies of others – who incorporate the words through ingestion, inhalation, audition, and proximity (2019:171&189) Lemons stipulates that transformation is not simply due to the use of holy words, but their incorporation into the other's body. In this context, the *dasha* incorporates the holy words of God and is thus, transformed from trivial objects of the profane, to a tool of divinity.[74] The holy words incorporated into the *dasha* serve to link the *dasha* to the divine, and to relay God's *tanbeeh*.

However, while holy words are utilized through *sihr* and jinn performances, they take a different form. When Mosa engages in "communication" with al-Malik, I hear a recording of

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[73] Mosa considers Ayat al Kursi one of the most powerful *ayas*, as it is common for many Muslims to recite the *aya* before bed and in the morning to keep evil away. For Mosa, it was a specific line in the *aya*, "and they encompass nothing of hidden knowledge expert what he pleases" rendering the *dasha* a tool through which God reveals what he necessitates as relevant.

[74] Shirley Campbell provides an analysis of objects imbued with magic where "the object is thought to have a life of its own. A separate power that is not only used by the owner but also, to some extent uses the owner" (2002:43&54). While Annette Weiner provides a similar analysis through her study of objects used in spells through words, utilizing Malinowski's notion of objects as potent in themselves, rather than serving as an analogy (1976; Mosko 2018).

different *ayat* reassembled. This practice of reassembling Qur'anic scripture into a specific formula was also used for the actual *sihr* rituals themselves. In one such ritual, a wife of a suspected adulterer wished to maintain her husband's fidelity for the price of four thousand dinars. I observed Mosa perform this ritual, which she explained renders the husband impotent in the presence of other women and thus physically unable to commit adultery. The ritual did not require the wife's presence, but it did require specific ingredients, an item of the husband's clothing, his semen, and a photograph of his face. Before Mosa began, she always performed ablution (*wadu*) to purify herself. She then took all the items, excluding the husband's photograph, and placed them into the bag, while burning harmel and reciting specific pre-chosen and memorized verses from a multitude of Qur'anic verses that have the word "hub" (love). From the verses, she only extracted the sentences with the word "love", and strung them together, creating a unique holy love Surah. While still chanting, she started working on the photograph, she wrote the first and last letters of the Arabic alphabet "aleph" and "ghayn" next to each other to represent the unification of the beginning and the end, it is an invocation of eternity.[75] Underneath the letters, she wrote a segment of a Qur'anic verse, "permitted to you, on the night of the fasts, is the approach to your wives. They are your garments, and you are their garments. They are clothing for you, and you are clothing for them" (*Uhilla lakum laylata assiyamiarrafathu ila nisa-ikum hunna libasunlakum waantum libaasullahunn*).[76] The sentences are extracted from their original context and injected into the ritual where they take on a new meaning. The sentences no longer denote permissible sexual relations during Ramadan, but permissible sexual relations in general. In other words, Mosa is employing a method of

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[75] "Aleph" and "ghayn" represent the first and last letters in the Arabic alphabet as they are arranged in Kuwait, (and more generally the Gulf). The Arabic alphabet has been arranged in different ways historically, and is taught through different arrangement in different regions (North Africa).

[76] The phrase is taken from *aya* 187 from Surah Al Baqara.

interpretation, in which she extracts passages out of their textual context. This approach is not a literalist, i.e., Salafi approach. Mosa uses this phrase to induce this woman's husband to abstain or in her words "fast" (*eysoom*) from other women. She then drove to an uninhabited desert region on the outskirts of the country, burned the bag with all the content inside of it and buried the ashes.

The amalgamation of different *ayat* (verses) is considered unusual because "*tankees*" inverting or altering the letters, words, and *ayats* of the Qur'an is thought to change the meanings of the Qur'an and therefore, perceived as *haram* (Islamically prohibited) by state authorized Islam. In this form, speech acts take on an additional function. In his analysis of Sinhalese mantras, Stanley Tambiah shows that language deployment is stratified when addressing gods and demons. For example, when Hindu gods are invoked, and the origin myths are referred to, it is articulated through Sanskrit expressions (1968:177). When demons are addressed or commanded, the words are "polyglot mixture and therefore unintelligible" (1968:178). He suggests that the "exotic powerful mixture" is not nonsense, but instead, is "consciously constructed to connote power" and "based on the theory that the demons can understand" while maintaining secrecy and an ability to influence demons (1968:178-9). This can help in thinking through Mosa's patchwork of Qur'anic *ayat*.

There are two points I want to draw out of this analysis: 1) When Mosa uses Qur'anic scripture to heal, she recites *ayat* and *surahs* as direct quotes from the Qur'an, without re-assembling them, yet, when she communicates to al-Malik either whilst in an alternate state of consciousness, or during a *sihr* ritual, the Qur'anic scripture is always transformed signifying a transformation in reality. This directly correlates to the divergent objectives between the two forms of *sihr*, healing and transformation. The first is to revert a person or a situation back to a

previous state. This entails an original (previous) state that has been spiritually disrupted by jinn, an evil eye, or harmful *sihr*, wherein Qur'anic *ayat* are used to resolve this disruption. The Qur'anic *ayat* are recited by Mosa and the client directly to God, enlisting His aid. While *sihr* used to "expedite" events, are used to facilitate a change or an event, where something new is produced which requires a facilitator – jinn. This requires a different style of "formulaic utterances" for the speech produced is directed to al-Malik (McCreery 1995). The speech must be made different than speech directed to God. This style of speech is a product of Mosa's spiritual knowledge and sacred power in relation to al-Malik (Briggs 1995; Tambiah 1968). 2) This re-assemblage of Quranic scripture is understood to be powerful, as producing effects because the power of *sihr* is related to the power of God. Despite the reformation of the language, these "formulaic utterances" are God's words, and thus, are imbued with God's power. Therefore, the language of *sihr* possesses a complex structure of language that is energized by the use of Qur'anic texts, and but it is the reformulation of such texts that enables the words to transform reality.

Wassmiya

When I moved in with Mosa, she had already been working with a woman named Wassmiya for nine months. Over the course of three and a half months, I saw them three times. We always sat in Mosa's bedroom, and she would often send me to other parts of the apartment to fetch her items she required. At other times, I would stand around her, in case she needed something. Usually, Mary would provide Mosa with this service, but since I was present, I took on the role. Throughout every session, Wassmiya was preoccupied, and I wound up conversing with Shaikha. During the first session, Shaikha encouraged me to sit down after standing next to Mosa for half an hour. I sat beside her, and she asked me questions about myself, about living in

Canada, and whether I missed living in Kuwait. Mosa had already informed her that I was doing research on *sihr*, and she was surprised to hear that *sihr* was of interest to Canadians.

Each time Wassmiya sat and recited an arrangement of partial *ayat* which Mosa called "*muhabba*" which has several meanings, "patronage", "bias", "favoritism", and "love". Many of the *ayat* Mosa chose had the root word love, union, partnership, and desire. Wassmiya read the specifically arranged *ayat* seven times while having two almonds underneath her tongue, after which she would take the almonds out of her mouth, blow on them twice, and repeat the steps two more times. She then was instructed to eat one of the almonds and feed the other almond to the man she desired to marry. While Wassmiya recited, Mosa held a *mubkhara* (incense holder) over Wassmiya's head and walked in a clockwise circle and recited the *ayat* with her.

Wassmiya was not in a relationship with the man whom she wanted to marry. Mosa divulges that it was Wassmiya's mother, Shaikha, who had approached Mosa for her work. [77] Shaikha and her daughter were members of the ruling family and cousin marriages were customary in their family, but Shaikha wanted her daughter to marry a specific member of their family, a particularly wealthy second cousin. Shaikha was introduced to Mosa, as her sister had enlisted Mosa's aid to marry off her daughter to a coveted male member of their family two years earlier with success. When Shaikha and Wassmiya initially met Mosa, she read her *faal* and discovered that the desired suitor was already in a relationship with a woman, and she saw there was *nasib* between them. She also saw that *nasib* existed between Wassmiya and him. She was perplexed by her moral predicament, as she felt uncomfortable in ending a relationship with *nasib*, which she understood to be a relationship decreed by God. When she expressed her reluctance to accept, Shaikha reminded Mosa that there was also *nasib* possible with Wassmiya

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[77] Shaikha denotes both a female member of the ruling family, and a noun a common female name in the Gulf region.

according to her *faal*. She further offered her a monthly stipend of KWD 700 as well as a house registered under her name consequent to Wassmiya's marriage. Mosa eventually accepted, as she was both responding to her circumstances and working within ethical ambiguity.

Mosa explained that when Wassmiya and her mother initially approached her, it was during a period where her ex-husband had still not transferred the housing allowance under her name, a housing provision that Kuwaiti couples were entitled to. As such, it was a financially difficult period. She asserted that if the women come to her just one month later, she would not have taken them as clients. However, she felt that because there was *nasib*, that it was within the realm of possibility, and that her intention was not to harm, but to form a union where she saw one was possible. Nevertheless, she knew harm was possible too, because she then drew on her own experience of *sihr* to suggest that if it was not meant to be, the *sihr* would be powerless against God's decree. This situation brings to the forefront the monetary aspects of Mosa's practices and the general peculiarities it entails.

It would be a mistake to characterize Mosa as destitute, because the income garnered from *sihr* and *faal* is supplementary, as she is currently employed and receives an income of 750 KD per month, 300 KD in child support, and another 350 KD in the form of a housing allowance, which equals to well over the average salary of a Kuwaiti government employee. I have often witnessed Mosa enact this financial independence by refusing *faal* clients because she "was not in the mood" and four *sihr* potential clients she deemed unethical. Further, as I have previously mentioned, Mosa seldom takes more than three clients, and during my time with her, I only witnessed three clients and thus, it would be unfair to deem Mosa's practices as purely an economic pursuit. And yet, the cost of *sihr* is expensive in relation to the average Kuwaiti income, with prices between 500 KD (1200 USD) and 8000 KD (24 000 USD) depending on the

task required. *Sihr* prices also differ in relation to the different practitioners, where some charge considerably less, and some conduct *sihr* for free if it is for a relative, for example. Thus, if Mosa's calling serves to aid people, and she receives income greater than the average government employee, then how can we understand the ostensibly excessive prices for *sihr* (excessive in relation to the average Kuwaiti income)? In the next chapter, I explicate Mosa's understanding of monetary circulation in relation to her calling and state financial practices and discourses.

Chapter Three:
The Circulation of *Rizq*

My stay with Mosa was interrupted by a ten-day Eid holiday during the end of Ramadan, where she, her son, Mary, and a family friend travelled to Egypt for a vacation by the sea. Upon her return towards the end of June, I moved back into her home. The following day, she informed me that she had to make an exchange at a department store and asked me if I wanted to accompany her, to which I agreed. When we arrived at the department store, Mosa recognized a skincare product she had overheard co-workers recommend. She fetched the product and proceeded to pay 40 KD for it at the cash register. I found myself perplexed by her financial decision, and more generally, puzzled by her ostensible disregard for basic accounting. The specific details that must be taken into consideration in order to understand my perplexity are as follows: I knew that Mosa had received her salary at the beginning of the month instead of the customary ending on account of the Eid holiday, presented as a gift from the Kuwaiti state. As a result, she had to wait until the end of July to receive her next salary payment; I knew that she currently had 75 KD left in her account, and that Shaikha and Wassmiya were travelling for one month. As a result, Mosa would not be receiving her stipend until their next *sihr* session near the end of July. With all of these factors on my mind, I wondered why Mosa only had 75 KD left in her bank account, and why was she spending more than half of her current resources on a luxury product? What happened to the remainder of the income she garnered from her practices, income, and subsidies?

What transpired next provided some insight, as it opened the door to more productive questions; while Mosa was in the process of paying, the cashier announced that the department was having an end of Eid promotion, "If you spend 40 KD, which is the price of the serum, you receive another 40 KD in store credit." On our way out of the store, Mosa exclaimed,

"*Subhanallah* ("may God be praised" or "God is free from deficiency or error"). You see, I have never paid for something without receiving more in return." The implication of her statement was that her monetary exchanges cannot be described as an exchange of the principal cost of an object because she "always received more in return." Her expenditure necessitated a return that exceeded the transaction, a surplus. This surplus is encapsulated by the Arabic word "*Subhanallah*", often used in an exclamatory manner to note wonders of the natural world; to acknowledge the wonders of God as free from error. For Mosa, the store credit she was gifted evoked the expression "*subhanallah*", an acknowledgement of God's wonder and divine decree. In other words, she understood her surplus as bequeathed from God. This example, as I shall explain below, is not an example of Mosa exploiting a throwaway remark to justify a luxury purchase. Instead, I reposition my analytical focus on the commodification of *sihr* in order to show how these exchanges constitute a unique economic rationality particular to the Kuwaiti socio-political, and economic landscape.

In particular, the way in which economics and religiosity have become entangled has taken a unique form. Filippo Osella and others have addressed the fact that Islam does not deter enjoyment or accumulation of wealth but stipulates ethical "prescriptions in its accumulation and use" (Osella 2017:219 Kuran 2004; Maurer 2005; Tripp 2006; Singer 2008). Within everyday life, ethical prescriptions are often woven within or used beside an alternative value system in a particular socio-cultural context. Many of such studies have focused on the practice of *sadaqah*, or alms more generally, that are characterized by voluntary charity, a meritorious and expiatory act which often carries the tacit (other times explicit) expectations of the absolution of sin or purification; a return from God, alleviation from suffering, effects spiritual transformation, or causes other grants of divine grace (Erie 2016:316; Singer 2008: 4&18; Weir & Zysow 2012;

Mauss 1966).[78] For example, in Mathew Erie's analysis of the "customization of *sadaqah*" among the Muslim Hui of China, he argue that Hui gift giving in the form of *sadaqah* is rooted in multiple value systems, it is a religious, ethical and cultural practices (2016:317). The Hui give alms (*sadaqah*), wherein one donates alms with the expectation of returns from God; another element of giving relates to Chinese cultural modalities through the notion of "losing face" — a form of status, and a cementation of social ties (Erie 2016:313). In this way, gift giving is a dynamic phenomenon, both self-serving and unifying. Drawing on Erie, in what follows, I analyze the intersection of *sihr* and economics in relation to the state's financial practices and discourses. In doing so, I delineate the different value systems at play, and how they fold into each other.

Divine Circulation

Through conversations with and observations of Mosa, her claim of receiving a surplus return on her expenditure through God's will was further elaborated most tellingly while we were walking beside a food court in a mall. As she explained:

> You see there are almost, one, two, three…there are seven restaurants here that are all essentially the same. They all have a "make your own pasta" theme, the same vegetables, the same kind of pasta, maybe different sauces. Some people will say only the "best" will make the most money, but this is ridiculous. I have been to many expensive restaurants that were awful, and yet they make so much money. Allah decides who will get the most and the least, Allah is the distributor of *rizq* (bounty), not people. These people here, they are all earning money even though they all have the same product. They can all live and

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[78] Erie names a third mode of giving, a giving as a means to enact autonomy. As the Chinese government heavily regulates and surveils Islamic activity, the Hui give and exchange within their communities to enact their Islamic autonomy (2016).

earn because each person is allocated their particular *rizq* from Allah (*kil shaks marzooq min Allah qhar*).

In this example, Mosa is negating the traditional supply and demand market logics of neoclassical economics and rooting each individual's allotment of profit - *rizq* in God. The word "*rizq*" which translates more accurately into "sustenance" with that sustenance ultimately being attributable to God, for *Al-Razaq* is one of God's ninety-nine names meaning the Giver (Aazam 2011:1).[79] What is of particular interest is that the idea of *rizq* is not completely a passive belief, by which I mean, it does not always necessitate one awaiting to receive what God has decreed for them. *Rizq* rests at the intersection between free-will and fate, for Mosa reminded me that one can steal *rizq*, "this world is filled with injustice, this is not the doings of Allah, this is the doings of man" she professed. And thus, one must also assert agency in claiming one's *rizq*, to the extent that one can, including the use of talismans and *sihr*, for both clients and the practitioner. The practitioner must do the work to obtain *rizq*, while the client may request (and pay for) *sihr*, or a talisman made for helping them claim or reclaim their *rizq*. In Islamic sources there is recognition and protection of individual ownership; earning through labour and trade is an act of worship, of obtaining one's *rizq,* and attached with these permissible modes of earning are prohibition on unlawful earning sources and income (2014).[80]

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[79] Classics scholar Mayerson Philip (1995) defines the word *rizq* as "provision" a noun derived from the verb *razaqa*, "to provide, to make provision for, to give for sustenance" (Qur'an, 1043-1044). Hence, the term can encompass anything which deals with a person's need or contingency. In many suras, the Qur'an cites God (Allah) as the provider: "He outspreads and straightens His provision to Whomsoever He will." (1995:279) To a Muslim, God is the All-Provider who makes "provision" for his believers. In the early stages of the conquest, the needs of the occupying forces, as reflected in the several treaties, were modest, mostly having to do with food (wheat and oil), but as time when on, more articles, including money, fell under the title of *rizq*." (1995:280)

[80] Muslims used the word *rizq* to justify their actions upon travelling to unknown worlds seeking God's bounty, i.e. *rizq*; while Western explorers used the word Risk in the 16 and 17 centuries as they embarked on their voyages to unknown worlds of danger (Aazam 2015). For a local example, the local Kuwaiti writings of a merchant reflect on the hardship that merchants overcame in order to establish successful commercial trade through pearling and shipping "with the aid of God" (Al-Khorafi 2003).

In Islam, wealth is considered a bounty of God and therefore it is not perceived as scarce.

Historically, the word rizq pronounced by Muslim merchants denotes God's written profit, in

which freedom in the individual's effort to seek God's bounty is balanced by the predetermined

dividend distributed by God from that bounty. In some accounts, during the transactions and

exchanges between Muslims and European merchants in the Mediterranean during the Middle

Ages, the calculation of profit by the faithful Muslim merchant was based on what is referred to

as the *"Rizq* Principle,"* which meant that one could never know for certain how much one's

profit would amount to by end of the day (Aazam 2011:1). According to the same accounts, the

word *rizq* was transmitted to Europe during these transnational mercantile trades and

experienced a transformation in meaning *(Aazam 2011;* Boholm *2015).* The inversion of *rizq*

became the basis for its European counterpart, risk, the calculation of the danger or loss that

could affect the calculation of profit (which highlights some of the socio-cultural and economic

differences between Europeans and Muslims).

Mosa did not inhabit a world of risk, she knew nothing of monetary loss, for her world

was not inscribed in the language of scarcity, but in the language of abundance; Mosa inhabited a

world of *rizq.* By this I mean, Mosa's conception of wealth is one of divinely ordained bounty, a

divine monetary circulation that assured sustenance, albeit, with inconsistent yields. In Mosa's

view, her allotment would always find her, because she viewed herself as a *"marzooqa,"* which

denotes a woman materially blessed by God. In Mosa's particular conception of the term, it does

not necessarily denote vast wealth, but a woman who will never be without the sustenance she

requires. Mosa's economic life reflects this philosophy, she does not have a savings account (or

any saving for that matter); she owns no assets, except for a luxury car that she purchased

through monthly installments. And yet, she spends exorbitantly. Mosa rents an elegant, well

located apartment, employs a domestic worker, and takes multiple vacations every year. In fact, she had spent the majority of her income on Eid gifts, and funded a holiday trip that included her son, Mary, her mother, and herself. It *never* occurred to her to think about the state of her finances after the trip because she is not in the habit of planning her finances, her finances always seemed to replenish themselves. Mosa was not remotely worried about only having *75* KD left in her account, and it was not a concern for her, because in her view, God would never leave her without.

This way of life becomes even more salient when considering all of her financial decisions and transactions. When Mosa was employed in the private sector, she was eligible for a 30-thousand-dinar loan (approx. 95 thousand USD), the maximum amount of debt available to her. Mosa spent the entirety of her loan within three years, on a car, vacations, dining and minor plastic surgery.[81] She does not perceive her consumerist practices to contradict her Islamic values, for she states, "money is a *waseela* (a link, or connection), it is meant to be spent. If you hold onto it, God will take away from you." The term "*waseela*" renders money as a link or connection that serves the function of connecting an individual to their desired objective, and simultaneously connects an individual to their divinely decreed *rizq—*through the first function. Within this cosmological-economic view, money and the movement of money acquires a divine impulse, in which it is received and then meant to be expended, to continue its divine circulation.

In Mosa's economic philosophy, accumulation is the anathema to *rizq*. Mosa's actions internalized this logic in interesting ways. In the Western world of neoclassical economics, her

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[81] Kuwaiti's largest importation is cars, and its fourth largest import is jewellery. Taken from https://oec.world/en/profile/country/kwt/. It is also important to note that several scholars of the Gulf argue that the previous influx of affluence has created mass consumerism to emulate the elite (Crystal 1989; Khalaf 1992). I do not completely disagree with this claim; however, Mosa's position as a *faal* practitioner, her exposure to many people's problems and difficulties, and her particular piety enables a different explanation. Furthermore, other examinations of mass consumer culture offer alternative perspectives. For example, others argue that consumerism becomes a means to express or to "play" with identity, personal values, and sexuality (Lazar 2009; Al Saleh 2015).

monetary habits may be perceived as excessive and careless. In fact, Mosa informed me that a few months before I had arrived, she secured a *wasta* for the renewal of her loan. Mosa required this *wasta* because she had already borrowed the maximum amount one was legally entitled to and was not eligible for a loan renewal. She described this event as a consequence of her *marzooqa* status; she required extra income that particular month because Mary [domestic migrant worker] was planning to travel the following month, and so Mosa had to purchase Mary's plane ticket home. She also wanted to employ a replacement domestic worker in Mary's absence. For Mosa, these requirements were met by God's divine sanction, which rendered human sanction (the law on loan thresholds) void.

Mosa invoked *wasta*-renewed-debt, *sihr* and *faal* practices as a means through which her *rizq* manifested. In particular, she drew my attention back to Wassmiya and Sheikha. She explained that they entered her life during a period when she was financially strained, and despite the ethical ambiguity she faced, she felt the presence of Wassmiya's *nasib* validated her decision to perform *sihr*. In the end, she thought of them in the same way she thought of all of her clients, as God's deliverance of *rizq* when she required it. Mosa proceeded to explain that she does not know when a client will request or be ethically approved for *sihr*, it – by which I mean the *rizq*—that *sihr* yields is inconsistent, and yet, God has always sent her at least one client. In this view, the relationship between *sihr* and money is not one of calculation, nor of utilitarian exchange, and thus, it does not adhere to the logic of commodification. Instead, the circulation of *rizq* lies in the juncture between divine sanction and personal action.

Between Practice and Discourse

If divine circulation of *rizq* is inconsistent, then how does *rizq* translate into Mosa's claim that she always receives more than what she gives? Here, I introduce and reintroduce two concepts

Mosa utilizes in relation to her practices and *arzaq* (plural form of *rizq), sadaqah* (alms) and *niyya* (intention).

I have previously mentioned that in Islam wealth is neither good or bad, its ethical value is contingent upon how it is used and how it is gained. It is imperative to understand that within Islamic cosmology, ultimately, all wealth belongs to God; humans are merely its temporary guardians, where appropriate provisions related to the distribution and transmission thereof are important (Wouters 2013:151). Some interpretations within the Islamic tradition nevertheless permit mankind the full ownership—the right to acquire, to use, and to dispose of, but not absolute ownership (Wouters 2013:150). Further key moral stipulations Islam makes on wealth include: the prohibition of squandering, hoarding, or harming the rights to others' wealth; each individual is permitted to use one's wealth for themselves, their family, and community subject to the condition that it is spent wisely and moderately for God's cause and society's prosperity in accordance with God's commandments (Mayerson 1995; Wouters 2013). Thus, Islam both recognizes the personal use of wealth, and simultaneously bears responsibility for the collectivity. Wealth has to be handed down in such way that the needs of all those surrounding the individual are taken care of, without, however, dispersing it in an egalitarian, communistic approach, by which I mean equal allotments to each individual (Wouters 2013:153). Islamic wealth management acknowledges responsibility toward the community and redistribution as key concepts at the very start of the chain and not as an end result—the basic responsibility for the poor and community needs rests on the shoulders of every individual (and not on the government) as soon as the individual has reached a basic level of wealth. The way Islamic

wealth management achieves this is through the redistribution of wealth, through *zakat* (wealth purification) and *sadaqah* (voluntary charity).[82]

Zakat literally means to grow or increase (Mayerson 1995). It is not a wealth tax, but a form of wealth purification—*tazkiyah Al-Mal* or purification of wealth indeed is not a cleansing process (of unlawful proceeds) but an intentional (*niyya*) act of purification of greed and selfishness, and thus enacts spiritual growth (Wouter 2013:151; Mayerson 1995).[83] *Zakat* is an imperative practice within Islam, that entails a common minimum of 2.5 percent of an individuals' wealth donated to one of the eight categories of the disadvantaged *(asnaf)*.[84] It is compulsory that all Muslims who have the financial means (*nisab*) give zakat as sanctioned by God.[85] However, real giving is said to lie in giving beyond the required amount of *zakat*, through *sadaqah*. *Sadaqah*, like *zakat* enables individuals to acquire cleanse themselves of selfishness and greed, and by doing so, the individual also becomes God-conscious in all financial dealings (Wouter 2013:152).

Sadaqa differs from *zakat,* where the latter is obligatory with a fixed annual amount, needs to be discharged as soon as possible, usually paid in cash and liability of payment is under Shari'ah description (Craig 2012:174). *Sadaqah*, on the other hand, is voluntary, not fixed, not invested, discharged according to need and mandate, can take the form of any asset, and can be

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[82] There is also *Qard Hasan* (benevolent loan), and a more permanent purification can be attained by the dedication of a self-sustaining amount of wealth to God through establishment a *waqf* (charitable endowment) (Htaya et al. 2014:175).

[83] For an in-depth historical excavation of the terms see Michael Bonner, "Poverty and Charity in the Rise of Islam," (2003); W. Montgomery Watt, "Muhammad at Medina" (1956).

[84] The eight categories are predicated on Surah Al-Taubah, verse 60 which stipulate: the poor (*fuqara*), the needy (*miskeen*), The Administrator of Zakat (Amil), Islamic Sympathizers (those whose hearts are inclined towards Islamic piety) (*Muallaf-at-Quloobuhum*), to free slaves (*riqab*); those that are in debt (*Gharimin*); for the cause of God (*fisabillillah*); those that are stranded during a journey (*ibnus sabil*) (Htaya et al. 2014:173-4) as permissible *zakat* recipients.

[85] *Nisab* in Islamic jurisprudence is the minimum amount of property or wealth that must be owned by a Muslim before he/she is obligated for *zakat*. It is also defined as a measurement that determines the obligation for paying zakat for male or female Muslims (Htaya et al. 2014:174).

given by anybody without any restriction. In the Kuwaiti-Islamic context, the most basic definition of *sadaqah* "those who spend their wealth in the way of Allah" is derived from a Qur'anic verse that discusses giving charitable donations or alms of one's money or of one's possessions in a manner that would benefit the Islamic community on the whole (Craig 2012:262). [86] According to the teachings of Islam, the giving of *sadaqah* serves a number of functions. Firstly, the act of *sadaqah* is perceived as an expiation for sins. The believers are asked to give *sadaqah* immediately following any transgression (Ihya-e-Ulumuddin, AlGhazzali, 1/298). *Sadaqah* also gives protection against all kinds of evil; wards off affliction in this world, and punishment on Judgment Day (Ismail Hakki, Tafsir Ruh-alBayan, 1/418). And, like Zakat, many understand *sadaqah* as a purifier of greed, as a means to cleanse one's attachment to wealth, thereby increasing it (Abdulwahab & Abdul Rahman A, 2011; Wouter 2013; Craig 2012).

Zakat and *sadaqa* are exchanges with the divine that are tritactic (pertaining to an exchange between three) not didactic (between two) (Mauss 1967; Mittermaier 2019). This point was first briefly demonstrated by Marcel Mauss in his seminal book, *The Gift,* in which he explicates *sadaqah*, he reiterates my previous points, under the *sadaqah* worldview, the gods own all wealth, and thus, one must buy from the gods, through a sacrifice, usually something small, for which one will be repaid exponentially (Mauss 1967:16). Mauss states that the original meaning of the Arabic word *sadaqa*, "like the Hebrew *zedaqa*" meant justice, which later came to acquire the meaning of alms (1967:76). In this context, the gift of *sadaqa,* like *zakat* is a principle of justice; in that generosity is required or God will take from the excessively rich and

[86] This definition is extrapolated from the Qur'anic verse (2:262-3): "Those who spend their wealth in the way of Allah, then follow not up what they have spent with reproach or injury, their reward is with their Lord, and they shall have no fear nor shall they grieve. A kind word with forgiveness is better than charity follow by injury. And Allah is self-sufficient, forbearing." Translated in (Craig 2012:262-3)

greedy and give to the poor (or sacrifice wealth to God) (Mauss 1966). It is a moral theory of the

gift, wealth and sacrifice that lays the foundations for the concept of alms (ibid). Amira

Mittermaier (2019) expands on Mauss in the context of giving in Egypt. Mittermaier critiques

compassion-based giving and argues that giving in an Islamic context in Egypt is not based on

compassion or social justice, pity, or individual solidarity, but is simply rooted in giving to God.

One gives to other only in order to give to God, not to the poor. Charity is thus not a choice

rooted in the self, but rather a duty and obligation owing to God.

Mosa's account of *sadaqah* and *niyya* draw on this knowledge, for she donates one third

of the income she derives from *sihr* and *faal* practices to a local *Hussaniya* that supports the

disadvantaged as a form of *sadaqah*—as a means of giving to God. Mosa explains that because

her action (*sadaqah*) begins with the *niyya* of purifying herself from greed, God always makes

sure she has enough resources for everything she needs, and often, an excess. Mosa understands

all of her resources as the manifestation of *rizq* whether in the form of clients, employment

income, gifts, child support and state subsidies. Mosa's discursive representations of her

economic philosophy foregrounds intentionality, *niyya*. To give away one's wealth (*rizq*) is an

enactment of one's intentionality (*niyya*); it expresses a repudiation of materiality, a negation of

greed. Further, one cannot simply give anything away; for the giving to be construed as *sadaqah*,

the giver must experience loss. Mosa elucidates this feeling of loss, "people are not robots, we

(*nafs*) are cursed with Iblees' (Satan) characteristics, greed, arrogance and pride", as such one

must counteract these inclinations through actions. According to Mosa, the by-product of

repressing egotistic (*nafs*) urges is pain. Conversely, it is the avoidance of pain that seduces

people into submitting to their desire instead of God. Therefore, Mosa views profit and intention

as interlinked, the more one has accumulated, the less they have put into circulation, and succumbed to their *nafs*.

Drawing on the Qur'an, Mosa eschews profit. And yet, when she purchased the luxury beauty product mentioned earlier, her focus was entirely on what she had gained, entirely fixated on profit. She interpreted the expense as a form of loss that was rewarded with a reward (store credit), a manifestation of God's divine circulation. She employed the term "*subhanallah*" to mark her surprise, further bolstering the point that the circulation of *rizq* is mystified precisely because she cannot predict the quantity of her *rizq*, or how she will gain it, only that she will. However, in this context, her loss was not donated to the development of a community, or to benefit those disadvantaged in some form, as *sadaqah* ordinarily is, it was directed towards her own individualistic gain.

Mosa's understanding of *sadaqah* and the loss it must entail took another interesting turn. During a conversation, Mosa reiterated the point of loss or sacrifice as a necessity for gain, she said, "*rizq* is not always a passive enterprise, look, even people who start businesses must use their money to make more money". In Mosa's perspective, one's monetary disposition must be based on expenditure. Whether this is in the form of donation to a *hussaniya*, the needy, goods and services, or one one's personal business endeavor is irrelevant, the relevance lies in the act and intention of departing with one's money—to give one's money to God. She begins to conflate capitalistic logics (to use money to make money) and weaves it within her own understanding of divine monetary circuits. Mosa retains the element of labour and loss. in both intention and act in her example in but eliminates the necessary contexts in which they originate. Now, one must expend in order to receive; but how one expends is no longer of virtuous concern, as long as one is expending rather than hoarding. *Sadaqah* becomes the grounds for

consumption, as it becomes embedded in the attitude of expenditure (money) and gain (materials) rather than an act of charity. Corresponding to Mosa's *sihr* practices, she reshuffles actions and definitions and then transposes them into a new pragmatic context.

 In my conversations and time spent with members of Mosa's community, in particular, Ameena and Huda, they did not use the specific term "*marzooqa*" to characterize an individual's material relationship with God, but rather the concept of *rizq*. Ameena, a seasoned *sihr* practitioner had an arrangement with other diviners who did not practice *sihr*. These diviners would refer clients searching for *sihr* to Ameena, and Ameena would compensate the diviners with a fraction of what she charged for the *sihr*. Ameena did not use the word "commission" she used the concept of *rizq to* explicate this practice:

> Because of our specific work, this arrangement enables a person's *rizq* to create *rizq* for
>
> another in relation to their work. The women send me clients they cannot help, and I
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> compensate them for what they cannot make; there is always a give and a take.

Here, on the one hand, the logic of *rizq* again appears to undergird Ameena's explanation, in which *rizq* is distributed through divine circulation. The commodified and commissioned form of *sihr* becomes a manifestation of divinely decreed *rizq* – not a transactional relationship between two people. On the other hand, Ameena's practice of commission is contextualized by her statement, "there is always give and take." Ameena is conflating the practice of commission, variable remuneration as a practice of sharing, with reciprocity (give and take). And, like Mosa, Ameena places *rizq* at the intersection between free-will and fate. This is reflected in Ameena's understanding of both the necessity and limitations of personal action. She states that each person must do the work to obtain their *rizq*, and yet, each person, despite fulfilling their work is entitled to different allotments of *rizq*. In Mosa's example of the pasta restaurants, each

restaurant proprietor earned a different amount of *rizq*, despite all of the restaurants serving more or less the same product. In Ameena's example, she differentiates between her work (*sihr*) and the work of diviners, and by doing so, she differentiates their *rizq* allotment—she makes more money because she conducts *sihr*, while the other women make less because they only conduct *faal*. This cannot be simply understood as different occupations necessitating different incomes, but the different work is rooted in different abilities. A *sihr* practitioner's ability is understood to be God given, and not a skill that can be cultivated by anyone. And thus, while it is the responsibility of each individual to work in order to receive their *rizq*, each individuals *rizq* is distinct, whether because of their particular skill or the number of clients one receives—for these factors are controlled by God and lie beyond the individual's agency. These statements serve in a sense to naturalize inequality, each individual is distributed a distinct and unequal share decreed by God. *Niyya* and *sadaqah* influence the extent to which each individual can claim those shares but cannot determine them, as the *rizq* principle dictates, *rizq* is inconsistent, and unequal. In this way, the logic of *sadaqah* becomes the grounds for both capitalist consumption and inequality, where capitalism does not negate *sadaqah*, it works through it.

Rizq and the State

The circulation of *rizq* within the Kuwaiti welfare state further demonstrates the kinds of aspirations formed—and how the tension between free-will and agency is enacted in pursuit of these Kuwaiti aspirations that I will discuss below.

During the end of my stay with Mosa, we were drinking tea in her living room when her phone began to ring. She quickly glanced at the screen and saw "mother" written, she silenced her phone and turned it over. Thinking back over the summer, I noticed that for the past month any interactions with her mother had suddenly stopped, and I asked her what had transpired

between them. The issue was that Mosa's mother, Nawras wanted Mosa to apply to a new housing provision offered by the Kuwaiti state to divorced women. This new housing would essentially be free because the government, as per a new welfare provision would provide her with a 70,000 KD interest free loan to purchase an apartment. She would be required to pay back the loan in minimal installments of 120 dinars each month. Nawras offered to move in with her daughter and pay the installments for her. This new housing arrangement would save the two women from having to pay for two separate rents and expenses. Mosa fervently rejected this idea. In fact, one year later, Mosa informed me that she and her mother now live together in her apartment, but she still refuses to take up the Kuwaiti housing provision. Which begs the question, what compels a woman who owns no assets and is in significant debt to reject a virtually free apartment?

During one early evening, Mary took Mosa's son to the cinema, and while Mosa and I waited for her clients to arrive, I asked her why she did not want the apartment. Her initial response was a concern over a housing criterion that required the receiver of the apartment to relinquish specific welfare entitlements if she ever to remarried. If Mosa remarried, she would not be eligible for property that is legally distributed to newlyweds, and thus, the property would be exclusively registered under her husband's name. Mosa wholeheartedly intended on remarrying in the future, and she did not want to be legally excluded from the family house. She felt accepting the apartment now would create significant problems for her in the future. For example, if her future husband was to die, if he did not stipulate Mosa as the recipient in his estate on his will, she would lose the right to reside in it if the designated inheritor claimed it. Furthermore, she felt that seventy thousand dinars was an insignificant value in the real estate market. She would be forced to purchase an abysmally small apartment that would be inadequate

for her household. "Why would I sacrifice my opportunity for a house and settle for a tiny apartment. I don't want to be desperate and act and then ruin my chances for the future. You never know what God has in store for you, maybe I will find a *wasta*, or a husband, or through one of my clients. You never know what *rizq* is destined for you in the future."

Mosa was self-assured in her statement, "it is just a matter of time." This statement draws on Mosa's divine framework of temporalities. What her statement implies is just because one may have the means to act, does not mean that one should. To requote Mosa from the first chapter, she states, "God does not work on your time, God works through the right time" when giving an account of *nasib*. In the same way, *rizq* circulates through transcendental time. Mosa's God is abundant and wise, and this understanding coupled with her status as *marzooqa* has led her to anticipate her *rizq* in the form of a house *when* God sanctions it for her.

The concern is never a question of existing resources. Mosa, her mother, Ameena, as well as other practitioners and client's comprehension of the state does not entail the notion of scarcity, for their view of money is always interlaced with Islamic cosmology. This view is not confined to Mosa, her relatives, practitioners or even clients, but are discourses employed by the state. During the early years of the modern Kuwaiti state that coincided with the discovery and exportation of oil (1950s-1070s) discourses of prosperity were framed in terms of divinely sanctioned wealth—*rizq*. For example, a billboard slogan erected during the 1985 parliamentary election campaign states: "The good things are for everyone, and "Kuwait's bounty (*rizq*) is for all Kuwaitis". Here, oil derived revenue distributed through state welfare is not perceived as such, but it is sanctioned as national *rizq,* decreed for all nationals. In another context, the student magazine of Kuwait University published a student's article entitled, "Let us remember God's *arzaq* (plural *rizq*)" he writes,

There are many blessed gifts in this country which only few seem to remember. Of these gifts, first is the gift of Islam to us. Our great thanks to Allah who made us Muslims and who provided us in this country with the blessings of security and peace, particularly when wars are raging all around. Another blessing is the gift of *rizq*, of affluence and easy life. . . Our land is barren desert, but Allah provided our food and clothes for us. Others cultivate the land, and we eat. Now we have it so good that we can afford to eat the fruits of winter cultivation in summer and the fruits of summer in winter. Others weave cloth, we wear. Others live a life of hardship and need, while we enjoy a life of ease... Aren't we expected then to remember all of these good things all around us and wish to protect them through labor which will promote our country's march to progress. We should not reject God's law by having the sexes mix in dancing parties, which some regard as their way of celebrating the good things this country has given them, while at the same time forgetting the faith and traditions of this Islamic country.

This passage underscores further underscores the first point, despite Kuwait's geographic landscape of a barren desert, the antithesis of abundance, God has decreed that Kuwaitis shall be abundance, conceptualized as bestowed upon with *rizq*. We can see how Mosa's privileged status as *marzooqa* parallels the in the context of Kuwait, *rizq* denotes divinely ordained national wealth. However, this passage goes further than the first, it collapses Islamic virtue into civic virtue, for to be a good Kuwaiti citizen is to be a good Muslim, which is understood to directly relates to Kuwait's economic conditions. In other words, citizen, Muslim, and *rizq*/money are indivisible, and must be understood in relation to one another. This is precisely the analysis I undertook in the first half of this chapter in the context of Mosa's monetary practices. In what follows, I trace Mosa's micro level monetary practices of credit/*rizq* and *sadaqah* to the macro

by a delineating specific financial/Islamic practices and discourses that the Kuwaiti state engages in.

Islamic Capitalism

The initial oil boom, the prosperity that followed, the minute Kuwaiti population, and generous welfare system created the landscape for consumerism to flourish – propelled by the category of *rizq* – limitless abundance. In fact, scholars have argued that Kuwait has developed into a full-fledged consumerist society, in which spending is more than just an economic activity, but a complex social and cultural practice (Crystal 1989; Burton 2015; Musawi 2014).[87] Today, although Kuwait is by no means a poor country, with a sovereign wealth fund that ranks fifth largest in the world, a fact even Mosa boasts about, it has nevertheless experienced a change in national wealth, and national wealth distribution. An increase in population, decrease in oil prices, shortage of land and the concurrent exorbitant cost of land, the 2008 financial crisis, and decrease in some—but not all welfare provisions have changed the economic landscape by limiting the amount of welfare provisions one may receive, and has received in the past. It is important to note that these changes do not affect each citizen equally, as I mentioned in chapter two, citizenship status determines access to state welfare which is a dynamic regulated and reproduced by the system of *wasta*. The rest of the population, like Mosa, who do not have the resources to consume excessively, as the Kuwaiti ethos is often defined, depend on systems of credit. Systems of credit are not new, interest-free-loans are part of the welfare provisions many

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[87] A study on consumerism in Saudi Arabia provides a more thorough analysis on the increased practices of consumerism that is applicable to the Kuwaiti context, as both countries share similar socio-economic and political factors. "The spread of consumerism in Saudi Arabia is a consequence of a complex of global and local factors. Commercial television and the internet, marketing strategies, relentless and manipulative advertising, urbanization, and proliferating shopping centers, are all components of globalization promoting emulation of the Western consumerism lifestyle. The national government subsidies and giveaways during the oil boom years due to increased national income, absence of taxes, public job availability, emerging middle class, liberal import policies, increased female participation in family purchase decisions, a burgeoning youth market, and increased per capita income have also enabled Saudi Arabia's transformation into a consumer society (Assad 2008:2).

citizens receive, however in the last twenty years innovative bank-based consumer credit have become ubiquitous, enabling the state to replenish the flow of *rizq* from a new stream.

In 2012, the Kuwaiti central bank revised consumer loan provisions to, "boost bank lending" where the many Muslims who reject usury (*ribaa*) have been provided with alternatives through Islamic finance via the state.[106] In fact, services from Islamic financial services in the MENA region have grown faster than conventional banks (Iqbal & Wilson 2005; Burton 2015). The state subsidized Kuwait Finance House (KFH) provides what are referred to as Islamic consumer loans and is now the market leader in auto finance in the Gulf (Wilson 2012; Othman and Owen 2005). Although the state restricts the interest banks can charge for consumer loans (not more than three percent), consumer loans a remain a source of considerable profit with the highest return for banks (Burton 2015).[107] Substantial lending in Kuwaiti is rather encouraged, and in turn, pervasive because inability to repay one's loan is rather low, for Kuwaitis by law are guaranteed employment, and thus not being able to repay these loans is never supposed to be an issue. Mosa recapitulates this point when I asked about her steep loan, the interest costs and repayment, she said, "we [Kuwaiti citizen's] each can take out this loan only once, I want to do it while I can still enjoy it". First, her comment points to the necessary rather than provisional nature of this loan, for Mosa says it can only be done once, and she wants to do it now. In other words, it is a question of 'when' and not 'if' whether or not the borrower has a specific objective for the loan (property, business, education etc.) This is bolstered by the streamlined loan process.

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[106] Taken from https://www.reuters.com/article/kuwait-banks/kuwait-adopts-new-loan-rules-for-banks-idUSL5E8G8AYB20120508

[107] Al Sadoun is also related to the former head of parliament, Ahmed al Sadoun. I make this point, to demonstrate that his position in society is determined by his contextual association. Many of the banks are owned by those who are in close proximity to the government. Taken from https://www.thenational.ae/business/kuwait-consumers-go-on-spending-binge-as-government-writes-off-interest-on-2-6bn-in-loans-1.301308

"It was straight forward, and I was approved with ease. The bank simply deducts KWD 300 from my salary [KWD 740] every month, and I will always have a salary anyways" Mosa explained. As many have pointed out, the Kuwait Finance House, its innovative Islamic financial products and "the Islamization of Public Life in Kuwait" finds "possible synergies between financiers and political clienteles" (Smith 2004; Terrell 2007; Burton 2015).

Innovation in Islamic finance further experienced a pivotal moment with the 1998 Dow Jones fatwa. The Dow Jones Fatwa sets forth tests for inclusion of equity securities in an Islamic index in conjunction to establishing a series of tests for assessing the permissibility of investment under applicable shari'ah principles. In doing so, it institutionalizes certain principles pertaining to (a) permissible variance or permissible impurity in the shari'ah context, (b) cleansing and purification of impure income (e.g., interest income), and (c) determinations regarding equity investments in entities that conduct some *haram* or impermissible business activities that do not constitute "core business activities" of the relevant entity and its affiliates (Siddiqui 2007; McMillen 2013). Firstly, the fatwa designates a shari'ah supervisory board that examines the core business of a company (equity security) (similar to a secular positioned socially responsible screening) and, in theory, must filter out business activities deemed *haram*. However, it is acknowledged that a pure Islamic capital market does not exist, and thus, the fatwa allows a degree of "permissible impurity" wherein a degree of interest or enterprise sanctioned as *haram* are permitted under the condition that the impurity is "cleansed" or "purified" by donations to charity (*sadaqah*) (McMillen 2013).

Under the Kuwaiti state, Islamic economic activities have been threaded with Western capitalistic tendencies and logics, thereby rendering such practices Islamic, legitimated by the state, and sedimented by subsequent recursion. In other words, the state uses the category of

sadaqah to take an Islamically illicit practice (interest, commodities categorized as *haram* etc.,), a practice understood to be outside the realms of what the state itself has construed to be Islam (state Islam), and resignified it as licit, and thus, within the bounds of state Islam. In other words, the state has taken the practice of *sadaqah* and inverted it. The purification from greed was originally the ends, by means of giving away some *rizq*, which has transformed into giving away *rizq* as a means of gaining legitimized *rizq*, or profit, instantly. *Sadaqah*, ordinarily an instrument with which to purify oneself from greed, in the context of Western finance has become an instrument, in part, subservient to greed. It is only "in part" because *sadaqah*, or charity is still mandatory, an individual or the state must still expend in order to receive. To put in Islamic terms, *rizq* must be circulated if it is to be circulated back.

The Dow Jones fatwa serves to illustrate the extent to which structural processes shape the margins on two registers. 1) Mosa's commodification of *sihr*, and her monetary practices more generally pertaining to *rizq* and *sadaqah* stem from the logics state financial practices. 2) The form in which Mosa reconstitutes state Islam through resignification of *sihr* and *faal*, as practices outside of Islam to inside the parameters of state Islam is accomplished through the manipulation of Islamic categories. This form is analytically traced back to the structural apparatus—the state.

Conclusion

Amira Mittermaier writes, "I hold that the anthropologist is not the ultimate arbiter of the 'real'" (2011:27). Reiterating Mittermaier's view, this thesis does not provide an authoritative view of *sihr* and *faal* practices in Kuwait, but a single narrative, a dialogue within the world of *sihr*, *faal*, capitalism, state Islam, class, and agency.

In this thesis I have attempted to provide a glimpse into the margins in order to investigate the ways in which hegemonic collective representation is shaped, renegotiated and reiterated. I have argued that Mosa's *sihr* and *faal* practices are resignified into state Islam thereby reconstituting the boundaries of state Islam. This form of remaking what constitutes state Islam through the utilization of emic categories to resignify ostensibly etic categories is a form transmitted through a memetic process beginning with the state. Where processes of resignification, limitation of agency, circuits of power (*wasta/sihr*) are aspects of Kuwaiti life that are reflected in *sihr* and *faal*. On both registers, Islamic loans, and *sihr* and *faal* are not simply reinterpreted by those deploying it, but becomes recursive by those the practices engage, albeit on different scales. In the context of Mosa, her world is constituted by the other practitioners she engages with, their clients, and her own clients, and those whom the client may share their experiences with. *Sihr* and *faal* practices ultimately enable Mosa to enact her religiosity and to transform her marginal status into a privileged practitioner, a receiver of God's divine guidance.

Mosa engages in *sihr* and *faal* as a way of practicing power in the "real" world, as a way of compensating her own lack of power and social agency within the strictures of a hierarchical Kuwaiti, Salafist society. Mosa's experiences reveal that religion practices are less a close ideational system, than a concrete set of practical rules tied to particular structures of knowledge and power, in the way religious beliefs are remade and adapted to particular constraints of daily life. Mosa rearticulates the *faal* practices from a mode of augury, to an ethical practice of *tanbeeh,* a means of guidance in relation to Islamic prescriptions "felt" through Mosa's *aql*, where *tanbeeh* is organized through multiple temporalities understood through the reworked Islamic notions of *qadar*, *nasib*, intentionality and free-will. These concepts offer a template

which *tanbeeh* works through and offers clients order, meaning, and hope in the present and future. Finally, I demonstrated how Mosa roots her practices within the textual Islamic tradition as a means to legitimize her practices, and herself within a society that has devalued her.

In the second chapter, I show how *sihr* is used to fulfill some desires and solution that cut through culture, class and time, such as marriage and marriage conflicts, while others are particular to the cultural and socio-economic landscape of Kuwait such as bureaucratic expedience where the necessity of *wasta* prevails. *Wasta* is a hierarchically structured mode of intercession based on connections for accessing the spoils of the state and is connected to citizenship hierarchy. Thus, I argue against benedict Anderson's concepts of a state conceptualized as an equal brotherhood through Kuwait's internal citizenship stratification, a legally codified hierarchy of belonging. This hierarchy prefigures claims of power, specifically political enfranchisement, economic opportunity, and access to state welfare resources. Citizenship stratification is reproduced and maintained within the everyday through the system of *wasta*, where those excluded from the apex seek recourse from *sihr*. I have demonstrated the way power in the form of *sihr* and *wasta* flows in circulations "hailing" and rearranging circumstances, people, and objects. In a society where social relations are imperative for one's social, economic and political life, *sihr* serves as a *wasta* for a *wasta* (in the perspective of the client). *Wasta* and *sihr* both serve as "short-cuts" to relationality, to transforming one's situation. Both practices are also notoriously fickle, and inconsistent, but they create a hope, a possibility, a means for an end. What is interesting about *sihr* for the practitioner is that, while economic success in Kuwait almost always requires a patronage relationship, status and fame imbues the practitioner with power. This is exemplified by Ameena's waiting list, she was not beholden to

any one client, but had the power to choose her client because of her reputation, her fame as a practitioner.

In the third chapter I analyzed the contradictions of *sihr* practices, the ethical ambiguities and the considerable costs of the practices in relation to the contradiction and converges of the state's economic and Islamic discourses and practices. I illustrated how the commodification of *sihr* and divination practices does not adhere to the logic of commodification, but instead is understood through the Islamic notion of *rizq*—which links the material to the spiritual. I argued that in the Islamic world, and thus, the world Mosa lives and acts, differentiates significantly from Western notions of capitalism, accumulation and private property, and communist notions of abolishing private property, equal allotments of wealth and provisions. In the Islamic context, all wealth and fortune belong to and are ultimately dependent on God, in which people are merely custodians of this wealth and fortune. Each individual is understood to be allotted a specific amount of *rizq* that must be put back in circulation through *sadaqa*, *zakat*, or inheritance. Furthermore, I showed how the state and Mosa both utilize *sadaqa* as a source of inspiration in monetary dealings, and simultaneously, as a means of justifying capitalist aspirations and practices. Lastly, I demonstrated how the contradictions of state Islam, and specifically, how Western economic practices understood as illicit to state Islam are rendered, or resignified into state Islam. In doing so, I argue that *sihr* practices parallel state structural practices of legitimization. These practices and discourses have provided the landscape for a particular economic philosophy to emerge. While the circulation of power through *sihr* and *wasta* provide transformations in relationship, the circulation of *rizq* provides Muslims with their divide share of wealth. While *rizq* institutionalizes unpredictability as acceptable – unlike its European reiteration of risk, which emphasizes the dangers uncertainty yields, that must be accounted for.

The confluence of *rizq*, Islamic economics, and Western capitalism, has fed into state practices and discourses in which Islamic practices were reiterated through Western financial modalities (neoclassical economics, and global capitalism).

In the last chapter I also emphasize the ways in which Islamic virtue and civil virtue are collapsed, where a good citizen is equated to be a good Muslim. This is an important point because much of the literature on Kuwait, and the rentier state more generally have been characterized as 1) states that do not rely on taxation for income and are thus released from democratic obligation to their taxpayers; 2) that the state spends oil revenues on placating and repressing its population; 3) that the social structure in rentier states leaves very little room for democratic opposition, or to put more forcefully, are marked by an absence of democracy (Sandbakken 2005; Ross 2013; Moore 1998; Luciani 1994; Huntington 1991). Here, I do not make the claim that rentierism depoliticizes the populace, as Kuwait has experienced a recent rise in state opposition.[88] Instead, I approach this question textually and empirically. In the third chapter, I quoted a university passaged that equated Kuwait's abundance of *rizq* with obedience to Islam, while in the introduction I argued that the Muslim/Kuwaiti conception was produced and reproduced through a mandatory Islamic education. From primary to secondary, teachers must use a ministry-produced textbook, where a construct of what it means to be "Muslim" is streamlined and merged with what it means to be Kuwaiti (Doumato 2007; Nakib 2015). Islamic interpretation is presented as "generic Islam" "finished" "unchanged" and not open debate

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[88] In an article by Musallam Al-Barrak, the face behind on of Kuwait's prominent opposition groups, he writes, "Kuwait is one of the world's richest countries per capita, and Kuwaitis seemingly enjoy a good lifestyle – wages are high and we don't pay taxes. So, why are we protesting? What do we want? We are protesting against an unconstitutional change in the electoral law pushed forward by the emir. The electoral system divides Kuwait into five districts; 10 parliamentarians are elected from each district. Previously people could cast four votes per ballot, but the new law permits voters to cast only one. This change aims to quell the national assembly's role, as it facilitates the governing authority's control of electoral outcomes – which in turn undermines the country's democratic legitimacy. Taken from https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2012/nov/25/kuwait-democracy-at-risk-protests

(Doumato 2007: Nakib 2015:12). In short, the school became a key locus of Kuwaiti-Muslim making, the outcome of which, according a study on the Kuwaiti educational curriculum is "an approach to education that is rendered uncritical by the expectation of obedience that comes with religion, to the convenience of both the government and for Islamists in parliament" (Nakib 2015:10).

Taking a closer look at the Islamic tenets which are disseminated, reveals a complicated answer of what is meant by "obedience." In analyzing Kuwaiti textbook, Taghreed Alqudsi-ghabra highlights two important points, first, she emphasizes the manner in which state subsidized education stipulates what is called "Islamic civic virtue" (2007:90) in which the responsibilities of a Kuwaiti citizen are rendered Islamic. Alqudsi-ghabra asserts that Islamic civil virtue emphasizes two tenets, tolerance towards others and the limitations of the Muslim/Kuwaiti subjects' free-will. She states, the textbooks stipulate, that one cannot choose to whom they are born, nor the religion, and socio-economic position they are born into (2007:93). This point is contextualized with what reality is and how it should be understood—*al dunya* as an "*imtihan*" (test) and "*ibtila*" (trial/affliction). In this view, the liberal concept of emancipation or complete freedom (*tahrir*) from affliction of any sort does not exist in an Islamic cosmology, for the emphasis is to submit to God (*taslim*) in a temporary world of trials and afflictions. Each person must live their test and is accountable for it in the next life. This does not mean that one succumbs blindly to oppression or defeat, or to a life of passivity, but it is to understand the limitations of one's agency. It is to understand that if one cuts off the head of injustice, that like hydra, three more will grow in its place, for reality is referred to as "*al dunya al ibtila*" (the realm of trials/affliction). This does not serve to naturalize socio-economic hierarchies, on the

contrary, it stresses the forms of inequalities and trials/affliction that exist, and must exist, and will continue to exist in some shape or form as to test the strength of one's spiritual endurance.

This Islamic cosmology is not particular to Sunni or Shi'a sect, but is found in both, albeit with different emphasis placed on limitations, and forms of recourse. Nevertheless, the Kuwaiti state disseminates this narrative as neither a Sunni nor Shi'i discourse, but as inextricably interwoven with Islamic/Kuwaiti identity. Consequently, this Islamic orientation is not about Muslims needing to comport themselves towards the ethical common good, wherein the ethical common good is defined as a good enjoyed by all, or at least a community, but takes up an individualist focus. For each individual must face their particular test and trials/affiliations, they alone are responsible for their sins. Thus, when Muslims act piously, it is not for the benefit of others necessarily, but it is an act directed towards God. For tests, trials and afflictions call for duty and responsibility, where one must often do or act in ways they do not want to. This claim is furnished by Mosa's acts of charity giving as giving to God.

This perspective enables Muslim/Kuwaitis on towards the middle of the citizenship hierarchy who recognize the limitations (political, social, economic) of their position, to forgo worldly desire, such as prominent social positions, and material abundance with an understanding that this life is temporary, and that such desires will be fulfilled in the permanent afterlife. This orientation thus directs Muslims to live for a different temporality, it is not just future oriented, but oriented towards a separate spatial-temporal realm entirely. For example, Mosa accepts her fate as unmarried because she lives in accordance with *al-akhirah*, the next lifetime. In the same vein, she and her mother understand the inequalities of society, distribution of wealth and difficulties of circumventing bureaucracy, but they do not protest, they do not complain, but understand what they have or do not have in relations to God, fate (*qadar*) *nasib*,

and an alternative conceptions of time— transcendental timing, *al-dunya* (temporal reality) and *al-akhirah (*the everlasting after life).

What can these conclusions tell us about the relationship between state practices, religion, and capitalism? How has global capitalism seeped into religious practices reforming ideas, practices and dispositions? The Dow Jones fatwa provides a single example of a burgeoning Islamic financial industry that has been integrated into state religion and legitimized as a new mode of Islamic finance, a new mode of Islam adapted for the modern world. Against the backdrop of decreasing oil prices, oil reserves, further expansions of financial markets, and increasing wealth divide, the role of the Kuwaiti state in mediating and regulating religion has become increasingly evident. Specifically, in the context of finance, religion is opened up – globalized and reiterated in tandem with capitalism, and not used to delineate or to close off. Islamic finance is only 26 years old, and thus, we expect to see new emergences of fatwas, financial products, and new modes of religiosity. How will this change conceptions of time, the relationship between materiality and spirituality (*rizq*) and the political arena?

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