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Connections are necessary and seemingly increasingly harder to obtain, yet connections are all around us and influence the items we use daily. We are connected through the social relationships and globalization that are involved in the production and distribution of objects we wear. When I feel disconnected from my culture or family I find significance and comfort in an item that brings me closer to them. The item of significance to me is one I wear daily on my left hand, a simple thin metal band that wraps around my finger with an eye in the center. The eye is adorned with tiny stones around the perimeter and a single dark stone in the center, it is a protective talisman known as the nazar. Nazar comes from the Arabic word for sight and surveillance, and is believed to protect the wearer from harm by deflecting negativity. The nazar is more commonly known today as the “evil eye” even though that is incorrect, they are used to ward off the “evil eye” which essentially means it protects against bad luck and negativity. It is a ring meant to be worn on the left side because that is the side closer to the heart, and on one’s index or middle finger but I’ve always worn it on my thumb because that is the only way to keep it from falling off and it is something I’d never want to lose.

My Babushka, or grandma, had gifted it to me after spending time with my aunt and her family in Tel Aviv, Israel several years ago. I don't often get to hear from my extended family so when my Babushka returned and told me she had a present from my aunt I was pleasantly surprised and curious. She opened up her purse and pulled out a velvety pouch as she began to explain the nazars power of protection and how to properly wear and treat the jewelry. It was a story I had heard from her many times before and a symbol that I was very familiar with

at that point, it was all throughout my house and featured on several other items of jewelry I had. Growing up they were a common symbol in my home since nazars are commonly worn or hung in homes, offices, and cars to deflect the evil eye (Weiss 2018). I recall her mentioning my aunt purchasing it at an open-air market near where my aunt lives in Israel and wondering if I would ever get to visit. I was grateful and admired the simple jewelry that now provides me comfort. It serves as a reminder of a part of my culture. Receiving a symbol of protection from distant family made me feel a deeper connection with my family overseas.

Eventhough I associate the Nazar with relatives and its interpretation in Islam, today it has many interpretations and has been used across cultures. It is believed to have originated in the Mediterranean and early accounts and artifacts relating to the nazar or protecting oneself from the evil using an eye talisman has been found dating back as far as ancient Mesopotamin cultures (Stoltz 2012). Discussion of the concept of the nazar was found in ancient scripture on cuneiform tablets from Sumer and Babylonia, that were created between 3300 and 3000 BC. A protective eye talisman was also used in ancient Egypt, it was known as the wadjet or the eye of Horus. It was a more detailed symbol and was an amulet worn by both the living and dead. For the deceased it was seen as a protective healing symbol and was placed on the sides of sarcophaguses and on the body after embalming. The living wore it as well as displaying it on boats, homes, and anywhere that needed protection from harm (Weiss 2018). Today the nazar is worn and displayed for similar reasons and has spread throughout the globe. This talisman has been found in Cyprus, Greece, Brazil, Israel/Palestine, Ethiopia, Georgia, Armenia, Albania, Algeria, Lebanon, Turkey, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Bangladesh, Iran, Iraq, Italy, Nepal, Bulgaria, Syria, and more. Its widespread popularity and adoption into other cultures and religions is largely due to tourism (Stoltz 2012).

The nazar was earlier spread by European colonists, then West Asian immigrants, and now continue to be brought out of its original cultures by tourists. This talisman seems to carry the same purpose throughout many cultures and has found popularity in modern style. The thin silver ring I wear is a modern rendition of the nazar that was likely mass produced and was sold to my aunt by a vendor in an open-air market. Originally nazars were amulets or beads traditionally made out of glass that had rings with shades of blue and white that represent an eye. That version is still widely available today, as well as more modern takes on the ancient adornment. Although, the widespread consumption of this talisman has resulted in misinterpretation and in the nazar being repeatedly referred to incorrectly. Especially in western culture the nazar is often referred to as the evil eye even though that is essentially the direct opposite of that. In places such as Israel a large percentage of independent business owners and the economy as a whole depend on tourism to drive sales, and the nazar in its many forms is a hot commodity (Stoltz 2012). It has become so popular that you can find nazar or “evil eye” jewelry and decor on online retail sites like Amazon. The large scale consumption and selling of the nazar is almost ironic considering one of the aspects of the superstition surrounding this symbol looks down upon consumerism and this superstition was thought to harm economic growth.

As mentioned previously the nazar protects against the evil eye, this superstition presents the evil eye as a curse that can be placed upon an individual through the malevolent glare of another. This curse can be placed through a look or even a complement, the action may seem benevolent but the curse is placed if there is jealousy or negative intentions. Those who believe in the superstition of the evil eye may avoid flashy or expensive purchases to lessen their chances of receiving the evil eye. In short, purchasing new things may incite jealousy and result in

receiving the evil eye, causing misfortune. The belief in the evil eye potentially creates the opposite of conspicuous consumption which is when people purchase items to make others envious (Stoltz 2012). This would lead those who believe the superstition to present themselves as minimalist or modest, which reflects the cultures from which it originated. It seems that the belief in the evil eye is higher in societies with continual high rates of inequality and a low tolerance for inequality, which makes some more likely to act out against the wealthy. Some economists have claimed that the belief in the “evil eye” may harm economic growth by discouraging big purchases or investments (Gershman 2013). It seems that despite economists claims, the globalization of the nazar has not harmed economic growth and unexpectedly seems to support the economy. That is because even though the symbol has become widely known, superstition and tradition surrounding it has not. The popularity of the nazar has introduced the symbol to a new market which has made it more mainstream and removed the cultural context and belief that created it. People may now see it as a mere accessory or pretty decoration without acknowledging or valuing the superstitions, beliefs, and purpose of the nazar. Despite the current misinformation surrounding the nazar I never forget its power of protection as well as the family and culture it connects me to.

The nazar serves as a symbol for protection and connection to long practiced traditions. This talisman is an example of the way symbols spread and are adapted by different groups throughout time. Its popularity in modern cultures has raised the demand for nazars and has kept this symbol alive but the nazar has become a widely misunderstood and misrepresented symbol. The misinformation surrounding the nazar has resulted in it now being more commonly known as the evil eye. Personally, the nazar I wear daily serves as a reminder that my loved ones overseas wish me protection and continue my family's traditions. If people were to acknowledge

the symbols' meaning and the superstition surrounding the talisman they would not only be keeping the symbol alive but the cultures that have created the nazar as well.

Bibliography

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Artsy, June 13, 2018. Accessed on November 14, 2020

<https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-people-worn-charms-deflect-evil-eye-millenia>.

Haley Weiss describes the origins of the nazar and its many modern interpretations and why they have come about. They also explain its many uses throughout time as jewelry and for protection.

Stoltz, Dustin S. 2012 "The Evil Eye and Mountain Karma" May 26, 2012. Accessed November

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<https://web.archive.org/web/20161123054716/http://www.dustinstoltz.com/blog/2012/05/26/the-evil-eye-and-mountain-karma>.

Dustin S. Stoltz discusses the history and modern interpretation of the talisman known as the nazar. The author also depicts how globalization has created several meanings for the cultural symbol and new uses.

Gershman, Boris. 2013. "The Economic Origins of the Evil Eye Belief". American University.

Gershman, Boris. "The Economic Origins of the Evil Eye Belief."

In this academic journal Boris Gershman examines the nazar in relation to history and its economic effects. He looks at the evil eye as a cultural phenomenon and the way societies have reacted to it. Gershman explains how it has real adverse effects on economic activity by negating consumerism.