

## ARTICLE

### Socio-Psychological Effects of the Beliefs on Supernatural Beings: Case Studies from Southeast Anatolia

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#### Abstract

This study explores traditional beliefs and practices on the supernatural beings as well as their effects in Southeast Anatolian society. Case studies from six provinces of Southeast Anatolia indicate that there are still severe socio-psychological effects of the demonic possession, albeit constant debate about the existences of supernatural beings is seen throughout the region. While the religious and sacred books have a different approach to this issue, this field study illustrates that the supernatural forces are mostly regarded with exaggeration and great fear. Moreover, the people in Southeast Anatolia seem to be inherited the traditional beliefs and practices of supernatural beings from their religious, cultural and socio-environmental background.

**Key Words:** Supernatural being, Psychiatric patient, Faith healer, Ethnography, Southeast Turkey

### Doğaüstü Varlıklar Hakkındaki İnançların Sosyo-Psikolojik Etkileri: Güneydoğu Anadolu Bölgesi'ndeki Vaka Çalışmaları

#### Özet

Bu çalışma, Güneydoğu Anadolu'daki doğaüstü varlıklar üzerindeki geleneksel inanç ve uygulamalarının yanı sıra toplumlar üzerinde bu düşüncelerin etkilerini incelemeye çalışmıştır. Güneydoğu Anadolu'nun altı ilden elde edilmiş vaka çalışmalarının incelemesinde, bölgedeki doğaüstü güçlerin varlığına ilişkin sürekli tartışmalar olsa da, bu güçlerin musallattan dolayı hala çok ciddi sosyo-psikolojik etkilerine rastlanmaktadır. Bölgedeki kutsal kitaplarda bu konuya farklı yaklaşımların olmasına rağmen, bu etnografik çalışmada doğaüstü güçlerin, daha çok abartı ve büyük korku üreten bir konu olarak bulunmaktadır. Ayrıca, Güneydoğu Anadolu'daki toplumlar, doğaüstü varlıklar hakkında inanç ve geleneksel uygulamaların dini, kültürel ve sosyo-çevresel geçmişten miras aldığı görülmektedir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Doğaüstü varlık, Psikiyatrik hasta, İnanç şifacı, Etnografi, Güneydoğu Türkiye

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## INTRODUCTION

Since the prehistoric time, humans have been in fear of different supernatural forces. While there is no scientific evidence about their existence, most of ancient and present religious sects still contain various accounts about supernatural beings (Razaliet al., 1996). While supernatural beings are a matter of constant debate across the cultures (Lim et al., 2015), mainly because of religious faiths, every society and culture possess beliefs, fears and rituals of supernatural forces, no matter they really exist or not. However, the beliefs on supernatural beings, their types, and the level of effects are varied according to regions and cultures.

For instance, beliefs in witchcraft are strongly present and witch-hunt related killing is still a common social problem in all over India, albeit having strong laws and acts regarding the witch-hunt (see: Mehra&Agrawal, 2016). Especially there are widespread beliefs among the tribal groups and rural societies that, mainly witches and demons are responsible for the famine, flood, deadly storms, earthquakes or drought like natural disasters as well as epidemics, diseases or sudden losses in the community. The beliefs are too strong that, around 750 people were killed as witches only between 2003 and 2008 in Assam and West Bengal States in India<sup>2</sup>. On the other hand, most of the witches in South Asia are believed to be the elderly women. Sometimes the whole family of the witch is killed by the locals. For instance, in a horrific case in recent past, all of the four members of a family of Santal tribal groups in Assam State in India were stoned and buried alive as witches for allegedly cursing a relative of the village headman.

The idea ‘witch’ is also widely rooted in all over the Europe (see detail in: Goodare, 2016: 27-30). Albeit killing and violence is no longer widely present in contemporary time, witchcraft became an “evil entity” that created rather than solved problems in Europe during the fifteenth, sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. There are estimated five hundred thousand people who were executed as witches in Europe only from the fifteenth to the seventeenth centuries AD (Ben-Yehuda, 1987:23). Moreover, eighty-five percent of these executed people were women.

Native American witchcraft have primarily been documented as part of a traditional worldview of shamans and magic (Games, 2010: 21-25). Witches/supernatural beings are believed to take the forms of animals in order to travel in secret and do harm the innocent. While most witches are women in European tradition, gendered association of women with

witchcraft do not appear among Native American groups. Moreover, the evidence of witches is elusive and indirect in Native American cultures (Games, 2010). However, after the European migrations into the New World, possibly the association of priests with witchcraft increased the gendered association in Native Americans beliefs of witchcraft with men –because the most of the Europeans that the Indians met at first were missionary priests. The connection of disease to witchcraft was also inevitable in the New World, since one thing witches did was to spread of devastating destruction by sickness mainly of smallpox, influenza, measles, diphtheria, whooping cough, mumps and chicken pox.

On the other hand, there are no such violent acts, destructions or enemy oriented witchcraft practices in African cultures. Witchcraft in Africa plays rather a very different socio-cultural role. It is believed that witchcraft maybe develop the potential that helps rising up and protecting the clan and the community as a whole. Witchcraft is a respected practice. Moreover, it can embellish or transmit from one generation to another within the family along certain channels (Middleton & Winter, 2004). It is also believed that the ancestors were equipped with the protective witchcraft of their own clan. With the help of witchcraft, the ancestors were even able to gather the power of animals into their hands. It is believed in African cultures that, if a community can make use of the witchcraft, it will rapidly be progressed in knowledge of every kind.

Like all parts of the Old and New World, witchcraft and beliefs on supernatural beings have also been common in West Asian cultures. The earliest written records about the belief systems in Mesopotamian (see: Black & Green, 1992) and Egyptian (Szapowska, 2009) civilization have shown that people have believed in spiritual beings such as angels, devils, demons, witches, and monsters alongside their beliefs on gods and goddess of different natural power. People also gave form of different supernatural beings with animal-animal/s and human-animal/s hybrid forms. Later in Hittite writings, it is also found that as like other parts of West Asia, Anatolians as well possessed strong beliefs on supernatural beings and magic in that time (Ünal, 1988).

On the other hand, especially Southeast Anatolia (Southeast Turkey) has been one of the core zones in Prehistoric, Protohistoric and Historic West Asia. Inevitably, Southeast Anatolian societies were influenced by the Neolithic beliefs of Körtik Tepe

<sup>2</sup> The Sunday Times (November 24, 2008). <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/witchcraft-is-given-a-spell-in-indias-schools-to-remove-course-of-deadly-superstition-hvhwd8nn5mr>

(Özkaya & Coşkun, 2009), Göbekli Tepe (Peters & Schmidt, 2004), as well as the beliefs in Ancient Mesopotamian (Black & Green, 1992), Hittite (Ünal, 1988), Greco-Roman paganism and later by Christian and Islamic tradition. Consequently, admixtures of prehistoric and historic beliefs have also been influential in the formation and shaping of traditional and popular beliefs on supernatural beings in the region. Comparing with the fundamental features of the beliefs on witchcrafts and demonic possessions, this paper attempts to present a glimpse of traditional beliefs, practices about the supernatural beings as well as their effects in Southeast Anatolian societies.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

This is an on-going research. Exploratory approaches have been applied in this research rather than quantitative and statistical analyses. In order to collect large and standard sample and case studies, fieldworks have been carried out in six provinces so far, respectively Şanlıurfa, Şırnak, Diyarbakır, Mardin, Batman and Adıyaman in Southeast Turkey (Figure 1). Personal interviews, case studies, and exploration of the local thoughts and beliefs on supernatural beings were among basic research methods applied during the ethnographic fieldworks. Open questionnaires were used for data collection, which is focused mainly on six types of supernatural forces correspondingly of genie, fairy, demon, angel, ghost, witch, and ancestral spirits as well as two evil forces, the evil eye and the black magic.

All obtained data was systematically evaluated according to six main aspects: (i) beliefs and reasons about the existence of supernatural beings, (ii) beliefs on the capacity of harming or helping people, (iii) whether they are living or dead force, (iv) the socio-psychological effects of these traditional beliefs, (v) treatments of these traditional beliefs, (vi) the reasons for some people groups not believing in such supernatural beings.

Twenty-nine of over a hundred interviewees are found to have directly experienced the effects or seen activities of different types of supernatural beings, dead souls and spirits. These twenty-nine subjects have been recorded as individual case studies. Among them, seven are males and twenty-two are females in different age groups.

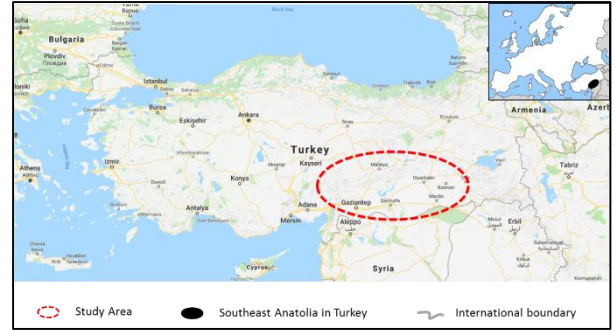


Figure 1. Location of the study area

## RESULT

### *Types of Supernatural Beings*

Ninety-six per cent of our research subjects either completely or partially believe on genies, demons, angels, and ancestral spirits; however, none of them believe on witches, fairies and ghosts. Most claim that they believe on these four supernatural beings because they are mentioned in sacred books of Abrahamic religions, mainly of Quran and Bible in region. On the other hand, most of the interviewees believe that witches, fairies and ghosts are actually the products of fairy tales.

Among the twenty-nine case studies, all males and females claim that they have experienced the existence of supernatural beings, mainly of genies around and inside of their body. Some claim that especially genies have been living within or upon them for over ten years. They feel their associated genies, both in day time and at night, as well as in the light or dark. Some regularly dream their associated genies whenever they sleep, in most case in a form of an unknown woman. Sometimes genies appear in front of them while especially attempting to perform morning or evening prayers.

Two subjects (one male of 43 and one female of 22) claim that they are married to genies, and even have children with their genie wife and husband. One male (19) had been experienced severe torture by genies that possessed him for over three years, between his age of thirteen and sixteen. He claims that the genies started torturing him because his mother unintentionally killed a baby genie by throwing a stone on the way back home some years ago.

Two subjects (one male of 39 and one female of 62) claim that they control some genies, and they are able to persuade genies for special helps. They work as professional healers, mainly of supernatural spirit and demonic possession related problems. Taking certain amount of fee, they provide different treatments of physical and psychic health related problems. Moreover, with the help of their associated genies, they provide

cure for chronic illness, problems in family relations, finding the lost property or even conceive a baby.

One subject (a university student of 21 years old) has been suffering from chronic nightmares. She claims that genies come and try to hunt her at almost every night. However, the soul of her father, who was a priest (local imam in the mosque), always saves her from these monstrous genies. In most cases, the nightmare of this girl ends by waking up with terrifying scream and heavy sweat.

Some subjects see animal heads (mainly of cattle head) and sometimes monstrous figures around them. They see these abnormal and scary features both when alone and with other people. They claim that these are actually spirits, who are omnipresence and able to take different shapes and forms in different situations. On the other hand, most of the interviewees believe that especially genies share human territory. Many of them believe that genies regularly come at night and eat the remaining foodstuffs with dirty dishes. Therefore, they (mainly women) never keep the dirty dishes unwashed before the bed.

Two subjects claim that they have seen the spirits of their great grandparents. In one case study, the subject claims that he has witnessed the living souls of a local saint who is believed to be the protector of the region by the locals. In all cases, these spirits and the souls have been seen in enormous form; walked in the shadow of light during midnight or late night, sometimes the souls replaced the lamps of their own tombs, and sometimes they even interchanged their graves.

On the other hand, only four present of interviewees do not believe the spirit or supernatural forces at all. They claim that the supernatural sprits were in existences in human mind during the time of prophets and saints when religious faiths were stronger and more effective. Present people do not believe on them because irrational faiths are no longer socio-culturally effective in the region.

### *Capacity to Harm and Help People*

Most of the interviewees believe that angels and ancestral sprits always help humans in different crisis and especial needs while demons, devils, evil eyes and black magic constantly harming and bringing misfortunes upon humanity. On the other hand, genies have the capacity to both harm and help people. It is believed that if a genie possesses upon somebody, it usually does not want to leave in an easy way. Genies can even have severe effects long after they leave from victim's body with proper treatments by the faith healers.

No adult individual has been found to be died/killed by the supernatural power so far. In most cases, the possessed patients often report that they felt the demonic forces entering their bodies and moving inside of their different organs. This eventually forces them to act strangely, with multiple faces behaviour and very odd movements.

New born babies are the most sought after victims of demon and especially the bad genies. It is also widely believed in the region that mainly genies can frequently kill new-born babies. For instance, a 79 years old woman in Diyarbakir claims that genies killed her eight new born babies and small children in her early age of married life. All of her babies died before they reach their two years of age. She also claims that her children were grown abnormally; they were unusually larger in size and heavier than the average babies in the neighbourhood because they were fed by genies. However, none of those eight babies left any distinct sign, unusual marks or sign of torture on their body when they died.

It is also widely believed that crops grow less if genies build their nests in the agricultural field. People usually do not want to go into the crops field after darkness falls. People also believe that evil eye and black magic have severe effects on human body as well as crops, animals, or any kind of wealth that somebody can possess. Therefore, especially skulls of dead dog are hung in the agricultural field and skulls of donkey are hung at the main gate of a household in many regions. People also place a skull of donkey at the foundation of newly built house.

### *Pattern of their Existence*

People believe that angels and demons do not possess any gender while genies have genders and age groups as like humans. Some claim that fairies are actually the female form of genies. All of the subjects in our study state the people can achieve the capacity to see or feel genies and ancestral spirits, but cannot see angels and demons. Some claim that the demons are a subgroup of genies that do not possess any gender or age. They do not eat or sleep, and they are omnipresence.

Both demons and genies can enter into any living souls like humans or any kind of animal species and transform them into their slaves. As like demons, ancestral sprits and angels also do not eat or sleep. However, they never harm the creatures and objects in the tangible existences. On the other hand, especially genies need food and drinks as well as they sleep in a certain time like humans do. They also possess social and family system and regularly use household and personal goods such as whisks, beds, plates, dress or ornaments. They are also

born and die like humans and also expect to have afterlife.

Genies are often thought to wonder in front of the main door of a human house, mainly for food and comfort. They also prefer staying at the toilet, bathrooms in the human households. However, most interviewees believe that demons and genies usually build their nest in waterlogged and marshy places, around the human household, very old and abandoned houses, riverbeds, boggy lands, and often at the graveyards.

### *Socio-Cultural and Socio-Psychological Effects*

People believe that demons and genies commonly live in filthy, swampy and marsh areas, and they are active inside human locality late night and early morning. Therefore, people usually avoid dirty places and do not prefer going out during the dawn and dusk when supernatural creatures come out for feeding.

New mothers stay very careful and keep garlic or iron while going to the bathroom and sink until 40 days after giving birth because traditionally postpartum stage is believed to be the most dangerous period for demonic possession. New mothers also do not go out of the house for shopping or any other purposes, and they always keep a piece of iron and a mirror next to them while staying in a postpartum room or a house.

All people are scared and behave abnormally during the period of demonic possession. Being so scared, many people finally give up performing prayers or any rituals because they believe ritual makes their associate demons angry and aggressive. They frequently talk to their associate demons, sometimes strangely change their facial expression, sometimes attack others with elfish very monstrous power, and sometimes scream with fear and severe anger. Family members, neighbours and relatives also become scared and avoid talking or coming close to these victims. People often keep distance for a long time even after they get well.

People in Southeast Anatolia regularly perform rituals, rites and prayers for the protection from demonic forces. They also maintain some personal, family and social norms (e.g. not talking about demons, not combing the hair at night, not throwing the stones or any hard objects in the air etc.) to avoid the demons, which have been the traditional and cultural components in the region.

### *Treatments*

Southeast Anatolians believe that especially demons and genies are very afraid of garlic and iron. Therefore, using iron necklace, amulet or garlic is the first object for the treatment of a possessed patient. People always keep a mirror next to the victim because they believe that

genies and demons die of fear when they see their scary faces reflecting in the mirror. Besides garlic, mirror and iron are also kept with new-born baby and new mother to protect them from the demons.

People also mix vinegar into water and have bath with this water. Sometimes, they spray this water on the floor, roof and inner walls of the house. Spraying of water with vinegar is also applied to the possessed patients.

In all cases, people first seek for a traditional healer or a faith healer as they regard all the physiological abnormalities as the genie possession or the effect of evil eye. Faith healers usually offer untraditional therapies of different types of rituals and activities. Some people seek for a genie-guided healer for the treatment of short-term physical and psychic disorders such as body pain, chest pain, severe headache, anxiety, severe anger etc.

Local sacred places, mainly of the tombs of local saints are the most common places where people seek for the treatments of mental disorders or abnormal behaviours resulted by demonic possession, evil eye and the black magic.

People take the patients to the hospital or psychiatrists only when the patients start suffering for a long time or go through a very serious condition. Out of 29 cases in our study, only 3 patients have been taken to hospital.

### *Girnavaz: A Sacred Place for the Treatment of Demonic Possession*

Girnavaz is one of over hundred sacred places related mainly for the treatment of supernatural power related illnesses. Currently the site is popularly known as 'Cin Tepe' or the 'Mound of the Genie'. Girnavaz Höyük is actually a Chalcolithic-Bronze Age archaeological site located four kilometres away from the north of Nusaybin district of Mardin province, at the point where the ÇağÇağ Valley is connected to Upper Mesopotamia (Erkanal, 1984: 121). The site represents the cultural occupations starting from the Late Uruk period and continuing until the end of the Late Assyrian period (about 3000 BC to 1000 BC). Significant architectural remains, various types of pottery, small finds as well as over fifty burials have been uncovered in this site (Erkanal, 1984 & 1985).

Surprisingly, some tablets which came out of this mound dates back to the Babylonian time. According to the local legends, the Babylonian witches were mentioned in these tablets, and the presence of some of the creatures resembling half-human, black-faced half-breed known as the Chinatown signifies the presence of demonic beliefs in the region in that time. People believe that the Babylonian magicians came to this hill to live with these demonic forces for days to meet and spell

with past spirits. However, no archaeological remains or epigraphic research has appeared to support this idea so far. Only the symbol of the god Nabu was observed on a cylinder seal from Girnavaz, which is dated to be Late Assyrian period (A. Erkanal, 1985: Fig. 4 & 5).

There is a deep well at the top of the Mound of Genie. The purpose of the well is not clear because building a well at foothill is more rational and more advantageous than building a well on the top of the hill. According to the legends, the Babylonian magicians communicated with the demons through this well. According to local beliefs, the genies of the Girnavaz city heal the mental disorders psychosis syndromes as well as physical disabilities. People come to this mound on certain days of the year, especially on Wednesdays and offer food for the genies who are believed to live there. These genies are specially known as ‘the Nusaybin genies’.

It is also believed that the genies at Nusaybin are actually Muslim genies because they were among the first genies who came to listen to Muhammad the Prophet (PBUH). People widely believe that when Muhammad the Prophet offered different genie groups to accept his religion Islam, the Nusaybin genies were among the first genies who accepted his religion. Therefore, it is widely believed that Allah (God) has given the Nusaybin genies special power and abilities to heal the people. As a result, there are still many legends and stories about the Nusaybin genies in Yemen, Syria and Anatolia. Moreover, until these days, Nusaybin genie groups are respected by the locals from all over Anatolia.

It is believed that demonically possessed patients or people with psychological disorders can get well after spending a night with these genies. As the Nusaybin genies came to listen to Muhammad the Prophet on Wednesday, the patients and their family distribute an especial type of oily bread, come to the top of the ‘Mound of Genie’ in Nusaybin on Wednesday, and mainly those with psychic illness spend the whole night on the top of the hill. There have been many demonic legends related to Girnavaz; however, wide practices of the treatment of demonic possession were mainly started during 1970s.



*Figure 2.* Mound Girnavaz and the sacred bed where physically disabled and psychiatric patients are believed to sleep with the genies at night.

The local people also claim that their wise ancestors warned them not to disturb the genies of the Mound of Genie at Girnavaz. Although the Nusaybin genies are Muslim and good genies, people believe that they can still be very dangerous if someone harms these genies intentionally or unintentionally. Needless to say, people have always been afraid of Girnavaz, and they even discuss about the places with great caution. Local people also visit Girnavaz every Wednesday, bake special types of oily bread and distribute them to the visitors at the site.

Beside of the neighbouring districts, visitors from all over Turkey are common at this sacred place. Almost all of these visitors have experienced or been experiencing severe mental disorders or different types of physical disabilities which they believe to be the result of demonic possession. Moreover, patients from foreign countries are seen among the visitors of Girnavaz or the Mound of Genie.

## DISCUSSION

The beliefs and fear of supernatural forces passed on from one generation to another for many reasons such as presence in religious scripts or trans-cultural literatures (Campion & Bhugra, 1997; Somasundaram et al., 2008), and therefore, almost all religious traditions possess different rituals for the protection of demons, witchcraft, black magic and the evil eye. The idea of supernatural beings is so powerful that approximately ninety per cent of the world’s societies believe in demonic possession (Al-Habeeb, 2003). Most people in Southeast Anatolia are Muslim, and as supernatural beings mainly of genies/spirits, angels and demons are mentioned in their religious text Quran (Al-Habeeb, 2003), people inevitably have beliefs on them while devoting themselves to the faith. Like these beings, supernatural forces especially of black magic and evil eyes are also mentioned in the sacred text, which are believed to have dreadful effects on human health and behaviour

(Krawietz, 2002). On the other hand, Persian and Ancient Mesopotamian myths and legends have also their influence on shaping the beliefs on supernatural beings in the region.

Geo-environmental background of Southeast Anatolia also helps promoting these beliefs. People in the region are heavily depended on natural forces such as rain and snow for agriculture and pastoralism, which are the main sources of their living. Long distance travel is not suitable because of the rough and mountainous topography in the region (Siddiq, 2017). Inevitably, socio-cultural features in Southeast Anatolia have been constricted with highly regional variations. The star-full open sky along with the high and barren mountains always makes mysterious atmosphere in human thoughts. Moreover, meteors or shooting stars have been considered as living creatures, and most of the time they have been believed to be supernatural beings such as a genie or demon in ancient tales and passed through generation after generation in Southeast Anatolia. Besides, all of the three versions of Abrahamic religion have reinforced the root of the beliefs on supernatural beings in the region.

However, unlike the South Asian societies (Campion & Bhugra, 1997; Somasundaram et al., 2008; Mehra & Agrawal, 2016) or American Indians (Games, 2010), beliefs on supernatural forces in Southeast Anatolia as well as in Anatolia/Turkey in general do not possess any violent actions against distinct human individual or groups since people in the region believe that the demonic forces themselves are omnipresence and have their possession upon the victims independently, and mostly without any mediator. Therefore, traditionally all major and minor physical and psychological disorders appear to be the possession of supernatural forces in people's mind.

In many cultures and societies, faith healers commonly evoke supernatural powers and identify spiritual disorders in showing the etiology of mental disorders (e.g. Razali et al., 1996; Champion & Bhugra, 1997; Qureshi et al., 1998; Razali & Najib, 2000; Al-Habeeb, 2003; Somasundaram et al., 2008;). Moreover, the faith healers make diagnoses such as psychosis, extreme anger and extreme jealousy that are often related to spiritual forces (Razali & Najib, 2000). Faith healers in Southeast Anatolia also play similar roles in the treatment of demonic possession. It is the faith healers who are preferred first in the region rather than the psychiatrists or doctors in the local hospital. Moreover, if patients get well from mental illness, most of the time they believe that they have overcome from the punishment of genies, not because of the medicine

prescribed by doctors or psychiatrists but of the effects of rituals and sacred objects such as amulets or metal objects provided by faith healers.

With some small variation, the majority of faith healers are religious and conservative by nature. They mostly enhance their knowledge and divinity by reading holy books and sacred verses. This situation is consistent with Asian and African societies, especially in those countries where majority are Muslims and genie/sprit is most common in the beliefs on supernatural beings (Al-Habeeb, 2003; Alosaimi et al., 2014; Lim et al., 2014; Sa'ad et al., 2017). According to established knowledge, faith healers with older age and more experience should have considerably better knowledge about the symptoms of spiritual disorders. However, this study does not demonstrate similar state. Various factors are responsible for this situation including their lack of medical knowledge and relatively little experience in psychiatric disorders. Faith healers in Southeast Anatolia sometimes also practise physical punishment and strangulation during exorcism of a demonic possession, which is often associated with severe suffocation.

Sacred places, mainly the tombs of both of low and high ranked saints, old mosques, old churches and ancient graveyards play very significant roles in shaping the background of the beliefs on supernatural beings as well as in the treatment of demonic possession. This is unlikely to other Muslim countries where mainly the faith healers play prominent roles in the treatment of demonic possession instead of sacred places (Al-Habeeb, 2003; Alosaimi et al., 2014; Sa'ad et al., 2017). Unlike of the Arabian Peninsula or Southeast Asia, sacred places have far more prominent roles than the faith healers in Southeast Anatolia. Tales of supernatural beings which are related to these sacred and religious places are commonly found all around the region. These stories are so strong that if someone has a nightmare or dream related to these sacred places, it spreads fast and fearfully as well as gradually takes position in spirit related local legends.

It is evident in many studies (e.g. Kua et al., 1993) that women possess more risk than the men for spirit possession related illness. The majority of possessed female patients are presented with chest discomfort, headache and abdominal discomfort (see: Al-Habeeb, 2003). This study also presents similar results. Among twenty-nine case studies in this research, twenty-two patients are female, and majority of them become ill during their postpartum period (six to seven weeks after they gave birth) when they were at high risk of mental disorder. Besides, most of these women suffer/ed from



chronic somatic symptom disorders including body pain, chest pain, abdominal discomfort, severe headache, weakness and shortness of breath. All of these twenty-two women were actually psychiatric patients since none of them has shown any neurotic abnormalities during the field study. Unfortunately, all of them were primarily thought to be suffering from demonic possession, and only three of them were taken to hospital only when their physical and psychological condition went worst.

While the South Asian societies relate all kind of witchcraft mainly with women (Campion & Bhugra, 1997; Somasundaram et al., 2008; Mehra & Agrawal, 2016), there is no gender effect in West Asian societies (see: Al-Habeeb, 2003; Alamri, 2016). Located at the centre of West Asia, gender effect is also not present in traditional demonic beliefs and witchcraft related rituals among Southeast Anatolian societies. On the other hand, women are found to be victims of the demonic possession three times more than men. People in Southeast Anatolia believe that there are two types of existences around us; the visible beings and the invisible beings. While supernatural beings such as genies, angels, demons, Iblis, the spirit of saints and ancestors inhabit the invisible existence, all kind of tangible objects and living beings like humans, plants and animals inhabit the visible existence. While visible beings possess male and female gender, supernatural beings do not possess such gender form. However, it is believed that especially genies have both male and female genders who invisibly live with and share human activities (Al-Habeeb, 2003). There is not direct interaction between these two existences; however, supernatural beings of invisible existences can have effect and possession on both human and animals in the visible existence. They can see and watch and eventually able to bedevil humans and animals if they wish. It is believed that the supernatural beings often enter into the body of the victim and move in different organs. On the other hand, ordinary living creatures in the visible existence are never able to have connection and interaction with supernatural beings in the invisible existence, but only the people who have achieved divine power.

There is not even a single case in which an adult individual is believed to die or be killed by genies or other types of supernatural beings. In all case, patients usually suffer from mental disorders such as severe anxiety, panic disorder, chronic nightmare, severe and unreasonable fear, interpersonal conflicts, alleged misfortunes, psychosis and severe anger as well as cognitive and physical disabilities. However, information from over twenty interviewees recommends

that discharge of a pregnancy, giving birth to a dead baby and especially child death are commonly believed to be related with demonic possession. Therefore, it is likely that common people in Southeast Anatolia usually do not possess fear of death from the supernatural beings, instead they are very afraid of physical and psychological disabilities as well as psychic disorders which will cause them personal suffering, family problems and eventually socio-cultural isolations.

It is observed that the level of effects of demonic possession varies between town and village communities in some parts of West Asia (e.g. Al-Habeeb, 2003). However, this situation is not consistent in Southeast Anatolia. There is no difference in the effect of demonic possession among the subjects living in village or in the city. Whenever they encounter different types of psychosis and mental disorders, both village and city people think these behaviours to be the demonic possession. Moreover, difference in beliefs on supernatural forces is not also seen according to institutional educational level. Old women of over seventy years and graduate university students below twenty-five years possess the similar beliefs and follow similar rituals for avoiding mainly the genies and demons.

However, sharp differences in the beliefs on demonic power are seen according to level of faith on established religions in the region. While a faith based people are highly affected by the traditional beliefs on demonic possession, no effect has been observed on the individuals who do not have faith on religious practices. On the other hand, awareness and physical health are the two factors which seemed to be vital for the effects and beliefs on demonic possessions, evil eyes and black magic (Lim et al., 2015). No matter having the religious faith or living in a city or village, people with rational views and strong physical health have very minor psychological effect/s from these traditional beliefs. Patients, who have particularly weak health, experience social trauma, go through family problems, are misinformed and have poor rational views and lack of knowledge about the outside of their community, are suffering both from the demonic possession and black magic related psychic disorders.

## CONCLUSION

Traditional beliefs on the supernatural beings as well as rituals and practices related to the demonic possession in Southeast Anatolian society are likely to be inherited from both the introduced popular religious sects as well as native socio-cultural traditions which have been practiced in the region since prehistoric time. People in the region have had feared and worshiped various

dangerous animals, different natural powers and mythical hybrids which eventually helped shaping the traditional beliefs. Along with this tradition, the narrations about the supernatural beings such as spirits, angels and demons in the Abrahamic religious sects have further contributed the variations and strong root in present beliefs on supernatural and demonic powers. Consequently, all of the abnormal, unexplained, mysterious and fearful matters are commonly seen as supernatural in the Southeast Anatolian societies.

However, there are still some people in Southeast Anatolia who possess doubt about the existences of such supernatural beings. Yet they do not characterize the basics of socio-cultural features in the region. On the other hand, the supernatural beings are mostly viewed with great fear and high exaggerations, which is far different than the narration of popular religious and sacred books followed by the societies, mainly of Quran and Bible.

Whatever exist or not, the beliefs of demonic possession have severe effects in Southeast Anatolian society. Witchcraft and demonic possession might appear quaint and exotic to some contemporary culture; however, to the people in Southeast Anatolian societies, supernatural beings are the unfathomable facts that often contribute to severe psychic disorders and eventually socio-cultural punishments.

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