

## Culture

# Magic and Social Domination in a Rural Turkish Community

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Volume 14, numéro 1, 1994

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1083260ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1083260ar>

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### Éditeur(s)

Canadian Anthropology Society / Société Canadienne d'Anthropologie (CASCA),  
formerly/anciennement Canadian Ethnology Society / Société Canadienne  
d'Ethnologie

### ISSN

0229-009X (imprimé)

2563-710X (numérique)

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### Citer cet article

Ilcan, S. (1994). Magic and Social Domination in a Rural Turkish Community.  
*Culture*, 14(1), 55–68. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1083260ar>

### Résumé de l'article

Un aspect remarquable des relations sociales d'une communauté du nord-ouest de la Turquie se manifeste dans la vie religieuse ou morale. Alors qu'il existe plusieurs versions de la vie religieuse au sein de la doctrine islamique officielle, une variété de croyances et de pratiques qui s'écartent de cette doctrine existent à ses côtés dans la communauté de Sakli. La magie ou le *büyü* fait référence à une gamme d'activités dont les buts et les raisons d'être n'émanent pas de l'autorité orthodoxe. La valeur et le sens du *büyü* se retrouvent dans les tentatives de subvertir ou d'altérer des situations qui résultent du destin ou les actions des détenteurs de pouvoir. Dans ce contexte, cet article montre comment les villageois confient leur projets au *hoca* (lit. instructeur en matières religieuses) qui tente de transformer le destin selon leur vœux, pour un prix. Dans le cadre d'une pratique d'intervention qui vise la résistance aux codes « écrits » ou aux décisions des détenteurs de pouvoir, les *hoca* empruntent souvent des prières Coraniques afin de faire se réaliser les projets de leurs clients. Des prières écrites sont employées comme objets-agents dans la réalisation des projets, tels protéger les villageois contre les malheurs, trouver un conjoint convenable, jeter un sort amoureux, et à l'occasion, causer des méfaits. Je soutiens que le *büyü* défie une harmonie entre l'autorité officielle islamique et la morale locale populaire.

# Magic and Social Domination in a Rural Turkish Community

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Un aspect remarquable des relations sociales d'une communauté du nord-ouest de la Turquie se manifeste dans la vie religieuse ou morale. Alors qu'il existe plusieurs versions de la vie religieuse au sein de la doctrine islamique officielle, une variété de croyances et de pratiques qui s'écartent de cette doctrine existent à ses côtés dans la communauté de Sakli. La magie ou le *büyü* fait référence à une gamme d'activités dont les buts et les raisons d'être n'émanent pas de l'autorité orthodoxe. La valeur et le sens du *büyü* se retrouvent dans les tentatives de subvertir ou d'altérer des situations qui résultent du destin ou les actions des détenteurs de pouvoir. Dans ce contexte, cet article montre comment les villageois confient leur projets au *hoca* (lit. instructeur en matières religieuses) qui tente de transformer le destin selon leur vœux, pour un prix. Dans le cadre d'une pratique d'intervention qui vise la résistance aux codes « écrits » ou aux décisions des détenteurs de pouvoir, les *hoca* empruntent souvent des prières Coraniques afin de faire se réaliser les projets de leurs clients. Des prières écrites sont employées comme objets-agents dans la réalisation des projets, tels protéger les villageois contre les malheurs, trouver un conjoint convenable, jeter un sort amoureux, et à l'occasion, causer des méfaits. Je soutiens que le *büyü* défie une harmonie entre l'autorité officielle islamique et la morale locale populaire.

*A striking feature of social relations in a northwestern Turkish community occurs in the sphere of moral or religious life. While there are many accounts of religious life in the context of official Islamic doctrine, a wide range of less official beliefs and activities are practised along with formal Islam in the community of Sakli. Magic or büyü designates a range of activities with aims and*

*purposes which do not emanate from the authority of orthodoxy. The value and meaning of büyü is located in attempts to subvert or alter situations that are the product of fate, or the actions of more powerful actors. In this context this article illustrates how local villagers take their projects to a hoca (lit. religious teacher) who attempts to shape fate more to their liking, for a fee. In their practice of assisting resistance to what is 'written' in codes or decided by the powerful, hocas often borrow Qur'anic prayers to support their clients' projects. Written prayers are used as objects that can effect goals, such as protecting villagers from misfortunes, finding 'appropriate' mates, casting love spells, and occasionally causing harm. I argue that büyü challenges the collusion between official Islamic authority and mainstream local morality.*

## Introduction

This article explores everyday magical practices in a small agricultural community (Sakli) in northwestern Turkey. Many scholars have presented spiritual life in the context of official Islamic legal and moral codes (Tapper 1991a:1; Turan 1991:32); I argue that this focus is incomplete, and excludes a range of less official beliefs and activities such as that of *büyü*. This article begins with a discussion of some points of difference between official Islam and magic, illustrating the former as characterized by official rules, and an emphasis on established societal roles and moral imperatives leading to judgements that are not mutable; the latter is characterized by a belief in change,

self discovery and the potential for effecting improvements in one's situation. In the second section I demonstrate the links between official Islam and magic, showing how *büyü* in Sakli uses Qur'anic prayers in an attempt to overcome everyday social or formal expectations. Finally, I conclude that *büyü* is counterposed to control by 'the establishment' and represents an anti-authoritarian practice.

### *Official Islam, Morality and Magic*

In many Muslim societies, magic has been a cultural tradition for centuries and began long before the coming of the Islamic faith (Bürgel 1988; Eliade 1985). Early Islamic thought, and particularly the Qur'an, aimed to eliminate the practice of magic. The Qur'an speaks profusely of idolaters, sorcerers and magicians and contains other revelations about satanic and demonic forces, but nevertheless condemns magic practises (Qur'an 2:30-31). The idea that people could or should manipulate supernatural forces is neither approved nor accepted within Islamic doctrine.<sup>1</sup> Studies of Islamic morality (eg. Qadir 1988; Rodinson 1972; Smith and Haddad 1981) often take morality to mean a belief in the attribution of all power and will to one supreme force, and either ignore or give little significance to magic.

In fact, in studies on the Middle East, conceptions of morality are often linked to the play of Islamic legal codes — considered as central forces governing major aspects of social and political life. Consequently, the moral boundaries of sexuality (Beck and Keddie 1978a, 1978b; Stiehm 1976), marriage (Afshar 1987; Youseff 1976), property rights (Zamiti-Horchani 1984) and gender relations commonly figure either as Qur'anic injunctions or as proclamations derived from Qur'anic jurisprudence. These cause-effect relationships raise many interesting concerns at the level of official Islam and moral relations.

The deterministic attributes of Islamic thought is extensively debated in theological and philosophical literature.<sup>2</sup> Much of this literature regards Islam as prescribed duties, laws and traditions, often excluding from the analysis a wide range of 'unorthodox' beliefs and activities that prevail in Muslim societies (Tapper and Tapper 1987:70). Sunnism, the most significant and mainstream segment of Islamic thought in Turkey, is characterized by the importance accorded to a literal interpretation of the Qur'an and the tradition, and by the primary role of the Law

(the *shariat*). For Sunni theology, morality and the law are inseparable (see also Gellner 1992:6-7). Laws derive from interpretations of the Qur'an; the *sunna* or tradition (based on the activities and words of the Prophet); the *ijma* (or consensus of the testimonies of the Companions of Muhammed and their heirs); and *ijtihad* (personal reflection on issues where the Book and the sunna are silent) or analogical reasoning (Esposito 1988; Guillaume 1966; Rahman 1966). These interpretations describe a hegemonic<sup>3</sup> or "scientific" Islam (see Rahman 1966 for more on the historical development of science and Islam).

The Qur'an presents many claims to appropriate and acceptable behaviour. Among these are extensive regulations of kin and gender relations, dowries, marriage, divorce and idolatry. In terms of marriage prohibitions, the Qur'an says:

ye are forbidden to marry your mothers, and your daughters, and your sister's daughters, and your mothers who have given you suck, and your foster-sisters, and your wives' mothers, and your daughters-in-law which are under your tuition, born of your wives unto whom ye have gone in ... and the wives of your sons who proceed out of your loins; and ye are also forbidden to take to wife two sisters... (Qur'an 3:75).<sup>4</sup>

The Qur'an sets forth the essential rituals and moral duties obligatory for all Muslims, including, for example, prayer, alms-giving, fasting and pilgrimage (Loeffler 1988:14; Esposito 1988:90-95; Guillaume 1954:66). In terms of property inheritance, the Qur'an advocates that:

every one kindred [is] to inherit part of what their parents and relations shall leave at their deaths... men shall have the pre-eminence above women, because of those advantages wherein God hath caused the one of them to excel the other, and for that which they expend of their substance in maintaining their wives (Qur'an 4:77).

These are some of the prescriptions that Muslims are expected to follow. Compliance to these prescriptions is perceived as obeying God's will or power.

Islamic morality attributes all power and will to one supreme force. As Smith and Haddad (1981) argue, "[i]n the Islamic conception, God as the Creator and Originator of all things has not only ultimate but sole authority over the beginning, duration, and final dispensation of all things ... His omnipotence, His freely determined mercy and com-

passion, His guidance, and His justice are the ultimate determinations of the affairs of this world and the next" (1981:2). Thus, official Islam presupposes surrender and submission to this singular will (Sonn 1991a:218), whose principal edicts and sacred knowledge are received from without. The conditions of life created by Islam are either experienced or undergone by its subjects. Therefore, in theological terms the Qur'an presents a series of mystical visions that happened to the subject (Muhammed in this case) and so warrants the conclusions that there are objective religious truths needing only to be described or told. Historically, according to Bürgel (1988:2), the active production of knowledge

in the shape of Aristotelianism was eliminated and replaced by an Islamicized 'wisdom of illumination,' ... Galenic medicine was superseded by a religious medical system developed on the base of the Qur'an and the Hadith, the so-called 'prophetic medicine,' and ... Aristotelian logic as an independent reference system based on autonomous rationality was called heretical, even though it was used willingly and skillfully in jurisprudence and theology.

Muhammed's illuminations were received over a period of twenty-two years (610-632).<sup>5</sup> These revelations, the groups of words uttered by Muhammed as inspired by God, form what was called a 'recitation.' They were taken down in his lifetime on a variety of materials and were collected and grouped into *suras* or chapters and became known collectively as 'The Recitation,' in Arabic as *al-quran*, and later in English as Koran (Esposito 1988:9; Rodinson 1971:83).

There is, however, no uniform or singular pattern of moral behaviour that could be ascribed, without exception, to official Islam; its traditional laws and moral codes are not exhaustive of everyday life in Turkey (Tapper 1991a:1) or in other Muslim societies. The intricacies of Islamic truths, or what I call *conventional Islamic morality*, cannot be accepted as 'given.' In addressing this central issue, Loeffler (1988:246) argues that "Islam has to be understood as the totality of all symbolic forms considered Islamic by people regarding themselves as Muslims; i.e., as an essentially unbounded complex of symbols and principles which on most any issue offer a wide range of possible, even opposing conceptions, meanings, attitudes, and modes of thought, each formulated with sufficient fluidity to allow ever more spinoffs, elaborations, and interpretations." It is therefore important to study aspects of Muslim

culture, not simply in terms of Islamic textual authority but, in terms of the inter-relations of Islamic text, local Muslim interpretations and values, and the deployment of religious practices.

Recent innovations in the study of Muslim culture shift the focus from Islamic practices to its practical deployment (Marcus 1992a; Sonn 1991b; Delaney 1991; Lambek 1993, 1990; Loeffler 1988; Tapper 1991b; Tapper and Tapper 1987; Kandiyoti 1987; Abdo-Zubi 1987; Abu-Lughod 1986; Eickelman 1985; Rosen 1984; Bourdieu 1977). Lambek (1990), for example, explores the role of texts and textual authority in the Muslim society of Mayotte (Comoro Islands, East Africa). In recognizing Islam as a text-based religion, he shows how this text becomes socially relevant through enunciation, citation, acts of reading, reference and interpretation. As he says, "[u]nless we view Islam in practice as well as in structure we cannot account for its relation to social organization or power, for the manner in which it both constitutes order and is in turn continuously regranting the authority to do so" (Lambek 1990:23). While the "practised versions of Islam" (Tapper and Tapper 1987:88) express the everyday moral world, more detailed and ethnographic analysis needs to consider the role of Islamic heterodoxies, i.e., magic and sorcery, especially in the realm of domination or power relations.

Official Islam does not form or inform everyday moral relations. This official standpoint ignores the context within which morality is deployed and the social relations that determine its meaning. Overemphasis on Islamic jurisdiction and jurisprudence leads one to underestimate the degree of discordance in social relations or else to view discord as a deviation. In reality, contests over authority are the *raison d'être* of moral claims, since these are the 'things' to which moral discourse speaks, and so constitutes its referential content (context). In illustrating this, Ahmed argues that hegemonic Islamic claims emerged in a struggle. As she says, the "restoration of historical complexity shows incontrovertibly that the hegemonic version of Islam has always been contested, and makes clear also that the challenge and debate between versions of Islam is not about a transcendent and 'God-given' Islam but about the clashing ideologies of different classes and about who, historically, had the power to make laws and construct the edifice of official belief and culture" (1989:145). Although Ahmed (1989) acknowledges the power relations associated with Islam, her

framework does not consider how other, less conventional heterodoxies might impinge on this official culture. By contrast, this study will explore the dominating character of magic in everyday life in Sakli. Before doing so, however, the differences between official Islam and magical practice should be made clear.

In this study, official Islamic codes represent the 'forces of tradition,' the value of continuity with the past and the emphasis on subservience to the will of another. Islam, at this level, assumes that the world is created and ordered in a series of events, and all that one can do is to describe, interpret and follow the system of laws which govern that order (Turan 1991:47; Lambek 1990:23). In Islamic mysticism, reflection and contemplation are central activities; change is the province of divine intervention (miracles) and is both unknowable and unpredictable. Official Islam says that every act is, in essence, divine will. Individuals, consequently, can not transform this 'spirit' of domination, they can only obey its commandments (see also Lambek 1990).<sup>6</sup> Therefore, official Islam strives to secure a standardized normative system based on the elimination of difference and the establishment of a value consensus. The Islamic notion of pre-destination (Smith and Haddad 1981:22; Watt 1948), for example, serves to reinforce this overarching value, determining a singular and future vision for its followers.<sup>7</sup>

By contrast, magic was so powerful that for centuries official Islam led an unflagging struggle against it (Bürgele 1988:2). As a pre-Islamic religious activity, magic (or what is often called Arab "paganism")<sup>8</sup> constructed a way of dealing with the world; it was organized around a philosophy and practice that conceived a multifaceted social environment subject to the play of many spiritual and natural forces that were indeterminate and therefore changeable. In the magical world, ordinary and extraordinary events betray no fixed meaning nor are they reduced to the singularity of a common cause. Since nothing is created or subject to any determinate fate, every phenomenon is endowed with a potential for change, and one can recruit these potential forces to further one's own aims and ends (see also Argyrou 1993; Lambek 1993, 1990:27; Loeffler 1988:172-173). This makes it possible for people to enlist even the "will of Islam" in support of subjective intentions. The power of Qur'anic prayers in performing magic, for example, is a central theme in Loeffler's (1988:172-173) provocative study of Mus-

lim practices in a Shiite Iranian village as well as in Lambek's (1993) distinguished work on Islamic discourse and sorceric practice in Mayotte. An important point here is that Islamic textual authority becomes socially and politically meaningful when we examine how Muslim peoples understand and embrace it, and what intentions or goals they have for it.

Magical practices (such as that of contemporary *büyü*) take the form of opposition to traditional imperatives, favouring instead a kind of voluntarism that challenges the collusion of Islamic textual authority and mainstream local morality. Voluntarism refers to the capacity for one to change events and circumstances according to one's will, and therefore assumes that nothing is given in advance or predetermined and that there is no fixed principle commanding the universe. As I will demonstrate further, *büyü* contests Islamic textual authority at the level of voice (cf. Lambek 1993:244), emphasizing a type of knowledge authenticated by the *hoca's* command over outward things, not a knowledge emanating from the will and oneness of God (see also Esposito 1988:6-7).

Accordingly, magical practice (such as *büyü*) is characterized by a belief in change and the value of action is measured in terms of the intentions it embodies. And, in Sakli, this is why people go to *hocas*<sup>9</sup>: their intentions are expressed through the magical relation. With the aim of altering what is written, magic aims to 'liberate' the individual (see also Bourdieu 1977:171) from the confinement of tradition, the laws of continuity, and the overarching structure of Islamic authority. *Büyü* is an individually motivated activity, and in the ecclesiastical sense, it varies from official Islam: it emphasizes motivation and self-discovery instead of pre-determination, final judgements, rites, rules and regulations. Within this moral system of aims and purposes, it is important to recognize that *büyü* is essentially anti-authoritarian (see also Lambek, 1990:30-31 for a similar argument) and aims to dominate 'the way things are.' In other words, the judgement that things ought to be other than they are, or that there is a separation between what is and what should be, is the germ of all moral declarations (Ilcan 1993:7), including the intentions characterized in the practice of *büyü*. What stands behind *büyü* is the aim to go beyond this disjunction and to change a given state of affairs or course of events. Essentially then, and as I will show further, *büyü* is nothing more than a form of the desire to

dominate (to overcome resistance) expressed as both judgement and practice (Ilcan 1993, 1992).

As illustrated below, I analyze *büyü* as an activity that makes use of official Islam for the purpose of overcoming a perceived, fixed state of affairs (cf. Rolands and Warnier 1988:123-125).<sup>10</sup> Given that religion is a system of norms, values and ideas, I take *büyü* as a religious activity primarily because of two reasons that will be substantiated later: first, it uses Islamic prayers (which embody Islamic norms, values and ideas) in the production of spells; secondly, the formal casting of spells are performed either by local religious authorities (i.e., *imams*) or highly respected religious and community figures. The fact that Qur'anic prayers are used toward other purposes and ends does not negate *büyü* as a religious practice; rather, it illustrates how Islamic authority can be applied and put to use in a multiplicity of ways.

The present article is based on interviews, oral histories and participant observation in a rural community in northwestern Turkey. In an effort to produce knowledge on the subject of *büyü* and social relations, I interviewed twelve household members (women and men) on its uses, established contact and conducted oral histories with all five of the prominent male *hocas* in the community, and relied upon three key informants to verify information and provide other ethnographic details. My interpretations of these data are not based exclusively on these formal and informal interviews but draw from a broader, native's understanding of their culture and from my one-year of field research which focused on other features and complexities of Turkish culture as well.<sup>11</sup>

### *The Practice of Büyü in the Turkish Community of Sakli*

Sakli is located in the mountainous, northwestern region of Turkey. It is some three-hundred and fifty kilometres north of Turkey's capital city, Ankara, in the province of Zonguldak. The overwhelming majority of its total population (567) are subsistence farmers, with some male farmers working seasonally as wage labourers in cities, nearby towns or in Zonguldak's coal mining industry.

In terms of household organization and village values, extended family organization (three or four generations) is the most common type of household composition in Sakli, representing close to two-thirds of all village households. Household members are

usually immediate consanguines, sharing some familial bond or tie, and occupying specific positions that entail certain rights and obligations based on age and gender. In rural Turkish society, more respect and honour are given to those older in age. The older a person becomes, the more status s/he gains. This fact is tempered by gender however, since it is generally the case that a son is considered more valuable than a daughter. A son is someone thought to protect the family, pass on its traditions (such as its name and reputation), bring in the desired daughter-in-law, and inherit family property. By contrast, daughters are encouraged to marry early and move to their spouses' natal family. Because of their "temporary" membership, daughters are accorded less status than more permanent household members (Ilcan 1993, 1994). Since residence held after marriage is predominately virilocal, it is common for a woman to live in her husband's natal household for an extended period of time (see also Koçturk 1992:66; Delaney 1991; Kandiyoti 1987:331; Sirman 1988 on virilocality in Turkey).<sup>12</sup>

With respect to conventional religion, villagers consider themselves as Islamic (Sunni) people and they often link popularized Islamic sentiments to issues of nationalism (cf. Tapper and Tapper 1991:61), ethnicity, education, sexuality and gender relations. Specifically, official Islam apprises village life and local discourse through formal Islamic teaching (in the mosque and in schools), marriage, birth and death prayers, and through some patrilocal kinship practices. Since most of the adult population (especially the elderly) is illiterate and many are unable to read the Qur'an, general knowledge about Islam and its customs are gained from parents and kin, the preaching of the local religious leader (*imam*) and other religious experts, and occasionally from Turkish newspapers and television programs. The importance villagers accord to the practice of *büyü*, however, is especially noteworthy.

Since the formation of the Turkish Republic in 1923, secularism surfaced as one of the fundamental principles and religious expression and demonstration became under rigorous control (Tapper 1991a:2). In fact, in 1925, all religious, quasi-religious and therapeutic institutions in Turkey were officially censured by the state, and the practice of *büyü* was outlawed (Öztürk 1964:348). These reforms may have encouraged a privatization of Muslim life and practice since, in spite of many prosecutions and punishments, *büyü* still exists in Turkey<sup>13</sup> and Sakli

residents do not distinguish it from spells or superstition. As a common religious practice, *büyü* is a central feature in understanding everyday moral action and in influencing the lives of people in Sakli as well as in other parts of Turkey (see Marcus 1992a; Morvaridi 1992:581; Delaney 1991; Mardin 1991:128; Öztürk 1964 for brief references to magic in Turkey).

Many people in Sakli engage in *büyü*, but the formal practice of *büyü* involves a social relation between a recognized *hoca* and a client requesting a spell. There are five official *hocas* in the village. While anyone can perform *büyü*, there are many requirements that must be met to become a recognized *hoca*. First, the person must be Muslim and have a 'good' understanding of the Qur'an. In Sakli, the local *imam* is a well respected, self-proclaimed *hoca*; however, the dominant *hoca* in the village is an elderly man who is not an *imam* but earned his religious reputation through many years of practising his craft. Secondly, while the exercise of *büyü* is not restricted to men or to *imams*, only men are viewed as "official" *hocas*. Thirdly, *hocas* are usually elder members who have earned the respect of other community members.

The *hoca* must be familiar with magical texts and be able to read and recite the Qur'an. This fact is important since to cast spells the *hoca* is required to produce a *muska* (written spell or amulet) consisting of one or more verses or prayers from the Qur'an written on a piece of paper, clothing or another substance. For centuries highly religious men (also referred to as *hoca*) had monopolized the skills of reading and writing which allowed them to establish contact with the powers of the spiritual world (Öztürk 1964:352). Whereas there is nothing officially "Islamic" about *büyü*, in the hands of the trained *hoca*, reading and writing from the Qur'an allows him/her to put these spiritual forces to work in all sorts of ways. One *hoca* comments on the links between Islam and magic and on the ethical character of *büyü*:

Anyone can perform *büyü*. There is only one condition: the person performing *büyü* must be Muslim. There is nothing fundamentally Islamic about *büyü*, but there is about reading material. For example, a person reads a short *sura* [chapter in Qur'an] about religious merits, written acts of worship ... But, from the Islamic point of view, it [*büyü*] is wrong because people profit by it. *Büyü* is objectionable from the Islamic point of view.

The fact that local *hocas* perform magic for a fee presents a problem for only some local residents, such as the village landlords. Village landlords have virtually nothing positive to say about the peasant population. Since it is well known to them that peasants engage in *büyü* as a way to mitigate poor landlord-peasant relations, landlords perceive peasant monetary spending as undisciplined and their purchase of *büyü* as both anti-Islamic and trivial. These negative views of peasants and *büyü*, however, do not alter or diminish the practice of magic in Sakli.

All *hocas* in Sakli work with a magical text. There are a variety of old magical texts that, according to key informants, are written either in Arabic, or in both Arabic and Turkish. These texts vary in content as well. While some have strict guidelines pertaining to the use of Qur'anic prayers in the casting of spells, others are less specific in the way Qur'anic verses are employed. Village *hocas* claim that if their 'secrets' were divulged to others, especially if people knew what specific prayers were used to cast spells, they would risk losing their craft to others as well as their reputation. Since the production and utilization of these old texts are illegal in Turkey, *hocas* keep these books hidden and their practice secret (see also Öztürk 1964:355). Village *hocas* rarely lend these texts to anyone and under no circumstances do they give them away (cf. Luhrmann 1989:136-144 on the 'secrecy' of sorcery).

People acquire two types of spells from *hocas*: protective and destructive. In the majority of cases, people obtain spells from *hocas* to shield themselves or their families against misfortunes, such as: poverty, environmental hazards, health risks, loss of fertility or sexual potency, village gossip, widowhood, etc. These spells seek to safeguard one's economic, social or cultural status or one's moral reputation and are considered as common and legitimate uses of *büyü* by local peasants. There are also a minority of spells directed toward harming others (i.e., unwanted grooms or brides, landlords, village enemies, etc.); these are generally associated with the power differentials that exist between women and men, peasants and landlords, consanguines and affines, and parents and children (cf. Morsy's (1978:611-612) differential incidence of folk illness) and they attempt to destruct or damage a person's alleged control or authority over others.

An experienced *hoca* has various techniques for carrying out a range of spells. Often *hocas* cast spells

over material objects, such as a person's belongings (eg. clothes, hair, nails) and they may use these objects to cause a victim to be well or sick, happy or sad, rich or poor. A *hoca* told of a spell he used to dissolve an unauthorized marriage or an elopement (*kiz kaçırma*, lit. girl kidnapping).<sup>14</sup> He said:

For a kidnapped girl, sometimes prayers are recited over a sweet cookie. In performing a spell, a prayer is written on the girl's under-clothing, for example, on an undershirt. Three separate spells [prayers] are written. One of these is put in an area where the girl steps, one stays with the boy, and one is put in a place where no one goes. The working of *biyyü* begins when the girl leaves the house. Finally, whatever is eaten, whatever is drunk, whatever work is done, results in a weakening, a sickness [affecting the son-in-law].

The request for this spell came from the father of the 'kidnapped' woman. In this particular case, the young married woman escaped an upcoming arranged marriage by eloping with a fellow villager. She has since been forced to restrict all ties with her natal and affinal households and her husband has lost access to family property and inheritance. The same *hoca* told of a love spell (*muhabbet muskasi*) a woman wanted cast on her husband. In situations like this, the *hoca* inscribes a prayer from the Qur'an on a piece of paper. After writing it, he breathes on it. In order for this type of breathing to have any supernatural powers, the *hoca* must 'remove himself from this world and only worship God.' The paper is then folded seven times into the shape of a triangle, wrapped in white cloth and pinned to the woman's undergarment. Another piece of paper, with a prayer inscribed from the Qur'an, is given to the woman. She is told to place the paper in a large jug of water and secretly have her husband drink this water for seven consecutive days. It is believed that the water will absorb the curative power of the writing (see also Abu-Lughod (1988:115) for more on the power of 'charmed' water). If, however, the husband is made aware of the curative powers in the water, the love spell is immediately broken.

Loeffler also documents the use of Qur'anic prayers in the performing of spells. A local 'fundamentalist' in his study site used prayers (*du'a*) to protect animals against wolves. As he said, "[i]t consists of two pieces from the Qur'an, the sura *va'sh-shams* [sura 90] and the verse *ayat ul-kursiy* [sura 2/255-257] which the Prophet himself told us

are good for this purpose. These are said over a pair of scissors or a jack knife, then you blow on it and snap it shut, and you define the region and time period for which the *damband* [prayer] should work" (1988:173). Likewise, in a study of texts and magic among Mayotte (Islamic) villagers, Lambek (1990) argues that swallowing written Qur'anic prayers is a direct way of infusing the body with the sacred liturgy or what he calls "a textualization" of the body. As he says,

[w]earing Koranic verses and astrological symbols sewn into amulets and tied around the neck or waist forms a kind of continuous 'illocutionary' act, though the purification or protection is accomplished through a statement in writing rather than in speech.

As a way to explain a course of events that is beyond anyone's control, village residents often say '*Allah yazmis*' or 'God has written it so.' *Büyyü*, however, takes 'what is written' and uses it to modify destiny and to alter a course of events in one's favour (see also Loeffler 1988:172-173; Lambek 1990:27 for similar arguments). It is a means to control spiritual forces and overcome the constraints imposed from without (see also Bourdieu 1977:171). This everyday magical practice is believed to ward off the 'evil eye,' cure diseases, soothe pain, protect fields from drought and wild boars, incapacitate a person from consummating a marriage, and punish those who hurt you. Additionally, misfortunes such as unemployment, adultery, marital conflict, impotence, and other 'disgraces' are believed to be attributed to the influence of a *muska* hidden in one's house, or to the influence of a *hoca* hired by an enemy. This enemy may be a neighbour, a relative, a spouse or an in-law. For example, a person who feeds his/her infant something harmful, fails to abide by his/her parents wishes on several occasions, or who refuses (mainly a young married woman) to have sexual relations with a newly married spouse, are actions thought of as immoral and often attributed to the onset of a spell initiated by an enemy. Even when women complain of being distressed (*sikintili*), they suspect a village rival (such as an in-law) of placing a spell on them (see Delaney 1991:108 for similar findings in rural Turkey). The social gravity of spells and its relevance to 'appropriate' or moral behaviour is most noteworthy here and bears similarity to the social significance of *`uzr* (folk illness) and its relationship to role behaviour in rural Egypt (see Morsy 1978:603).



Depending upon the type of *büyük* requested, a *hoca* costs between 5,000 and 500,000 T.L., which is expensive considering that the average wage labourer in Sakli makes less than 300,000 T.L. monthly (1988-89 figures). If, for example, household members cannot find a 'suitable' wife for their son, they often enlist the help of a *hoca*. The fee charged by *hocas*, especially in bride searches, is costly and inflates the total cost of 'bringing in' a bride. One *hoca* commented by saying:

A man's son will marry, but a girl has not yet been found for him. He [the father] comes to me and says, 'how much will it cost to get a girl?' I say I want two to three hundred thousand T.L. ... It's worth this much money.

Especially in situations where many attempts have been made to find an 'appropriate' mate, the relatively high cost of hiring *hocas* for spousal searches is considered a worthwhile and necessary expenditure.

Although *hocas* are skilled at casting spells or producing *muska*, they have little effect in mitigating the influences of *muskas* cast by others. Only *cincis* (lit. demon masters) can remove spells induced by *hocas*. Typically, *cincis* are old *hocas* and they are believed to be well trained in talking to demons. *Hocas* are the leading religious figures in Turkish society and, in the past, they were the religious teachers. For many centuries, *hocas* were disciplined and educated in religious schools called *medresehs*. When these schools were abolished, soon after the establishment of the Republic in 1923 (Tapper 1991a:6; Akşit 1991:157-158), *hocas* were trained through apprenticeship. Both *hocas* and *cincis* are considered to have *keramet*, a supernatural power to heal and to strengthen (see also Öztürk 1964:353). *Cincis* are, however, ascribed as having great spiritual fortitude.

There is only one recognized *cinci* in Sakli, though there are others in nearby villages. To become a *cinci*, one must go through an elaborate rite of passage. A village *hoca* explained part of this meritorious process:

You will fast for three days. On the night of the third day, you will start to pray. While you are praying, a snake will come in the night. It will greet you. If you stop praying, the snake will not greet you. Some time later it will go. Still, you will continue praying. Some time later a dragon will come, then seven different dragons will follow. They will say to you "peace be with

you." Again, if you stop praying, they will not greet you. Some time later, they will go. Still, you will continue praying. This time, an old, white haired and bearded man will come and say "peace be with you." You will finish your prayers and you will greet him and say "peace be upon you." The man will say "person, whatever you request from me, say so." You will say "I want to know about all phenomena." Then you will become a *cinci*.

When villagers experience extensive and repeated trauma in their lives (eg. the death of two or more relatives in a short period of time), they believe that these experiences stem from the influence of a *muska* hidden in their house. *Cincis* are thought to be more successful in terminating the effects of *büyük* once *muskas* are found. Sometimes villagers spend countless days looking for a *muska* and, later, others are brought in to help in the search. This creates somewhat of a moral panic, since others begin to assess their own trauma or troubles in the context of spells and enemies.

There are less formal techniques in the performing of *büyük*. Putting pork fat on household materials, or tying a piece of hair or clothing on a tree branch located in a sacred place are ways in which people engage *büyük* at an informal level. Even in other areas of Turkey, visits to sacred places or sanctuaries are common. Marcus (1992a:130-134) discusses the religious significance of Turkish women's pilgrimages to shrines and the rituals associated with them. She offers an ethnographic account of what this involves for women participating in such events:

On arrival at the tomb, most women consult and pray with a female *hoca*, buying the necessary cotton from her. The cotton is unwound from the wooden spool as women walk clockwise around the tomb, praying as they go. The prayers are often intensely personal. As the unwinding is completed, the empty spool is thrown down the side of the hill. It is then usual to sprinkle a bottle of water onto the top of the tomb, together with the reiteration of the appropriate prayers. Some women light a candle or two at the fire which burns at the head of the grave, and those seeking fertility for themselves or another may make and hang a small cradle of rag and string on the branches of a small tree. At the end of these rites, a personal prayer (*dua*) is spoken aloud and the vow made (Marcus 1992a:133).

A similar kind of shrine and practice exists in Sakli. A tomb or *türbe* is a sacred location believed to be the burial place of an ancient and powerful *hoca*. Located on a hill top in a grassy field, the tomb is covered with hundreds of small stones and the branches of two nearby trees are weighed down with several strings of clothing, hair and other materials.

People frequent this site in an effort to control aspects of their lives as well as other peoples'. It is visited by women, and to a lesser extent by men, eager for a remedy for any ailment or disease, ranging from colds to severe breathing and heart problems. It is visited, too, to increase virility and fertility, impede the progress of unwanted pregnancies, soothe emotional ills, protect 'tradition' (by regulating, for example, the outcome of spousal searches) and to improve financial or economic standing (see Tambiah 1990:106-108 for some similar findings). Furthermore, the use of trees or stones is a part of this ritual practice. For example, tying a piece of your sick child's clothing to a tree, while reciting a Qur'anic verse and walking around the burial ground, is believed to eliminate your child's problem or illness.<sup>15</sup> The same results if one engages in Qur'anic prayers while simultaneously placing stones on top of the burial ground. One older woman, who has frequented this sacred place for over forty years, comments on her visits to the *türbe*:

My mother took us there when we were young. One time she saw my younger brother eating leaves from the ground and the next day she took all of us to the *türbe*. We spent a whole day there. After that, my brother never chewed on any more leaves... I still, but not as much now, visit the *türbe* at least once a year... Last spring, my son-in-law was spending too much time away from his family and, you understand, my daughter was worried that he might be visiting another woman in Istanbul. She needed some help I thought, and so I took her and my grandchildren there...

This kind of 'informal' religious practice is mainly the domain of females (see also Marcus 1992a; Tapper and Tapper 1987; Tapper 1983). It is common for Sakli women to place spells on others via the rituals associated with *türbe*. Similar to their male kins' journey to Mecca, women and young children make pilgrimages to this sacred place to engage the assistance of spiritual forces.<sup>16</sup> Even though this form of *büyü* is the province of women, village men claim *büyü* works best when performed by a male. In this

society there is a strong tendency to attribute magical powers to men, and ignore women's role in the process (though many women participate).

Magical practices (formal and informal) play a role in many aspects of village life and are central in establishing or arranging marriages, creating love spells, and dealing with 'unruly' spouses. Since arranged marriages are common in Sakli (as in other areas of Turkey, see Delaney 1991; Sirman 1988:116; Vergin 1985; Olson 1982:48; Fallers and Fallers 1976:251; Kandiyoti 1977, 1974; Casson and Özertuğ 1974), it is typical for a father to place a spell upon a woman he would like his son to marry, especially if her family is reluctant to agree to the marriage. In other cases, young unmarried women may place love spells on men they wish to marry. Should they not desire to marry the person selected by their parents, they may cast an evil spell on this chosen partner. In one situation, a young woman was told by her parents that they arranged for her to marry her MBS (cross-cousin). She responded by saying that she did not want this; but her parents were adamant. Later that day, the young woman visited a local *hoca*. The *hoca* cast a spell upon the young cousin she was supposed to marry, and the young woman was then satisfied that the marriage would not take place. The woman has since married another man.

Conversely, when faced with an unapproved marriage (especially *kiz kaçırma*), it is common for a parent to visit a local *hoca* and ask him to cast a spell on the son-in-law. This spell is believed to harm the son-in-law or, at least, make him leave his wife. A villager recalled what happened in a situation of *kiz kaçırma*:

A girl was kidnapped. A *hoca* placed a *büyü* on the son-in-law. Five days later, the child became sick and slowly died... While performing *büyü*, a prayer is written on the face of the soap and then thrown into a well. This soap dissolves in the water and the person - for whom the *büyü* is cast - dissolves [passes away]... If I have an enemy, and if I want something bad to happen to him, what do I do? I go to the *hoca* and I give forty to fifty thousand T.L. to cast this *büyü*. No one will know that I caused something bad to happen to him.

These sorts of harmful spells are typically associated with power differentials existing between parents and children and, as such, they seek to position or reposition certain people in relations of domination and subordination.

At the same time that it is common for villagers to visit local *hocas* to stop an unapproved marriage, it is routine for parents to intervene after the marriage of their daughter or son. In one situation, a couple was having difficulty 'consummating' their marriage and the son's parents believed that one of their village enemies had placed a *muska* in the room. After failing to find the *muska*, the young couple was told to move to another room that was considered safer. Soon after the relocation, the couple presented a sheet stained with blood to the groom's parents.<sup>17</sup>

In another incident, a man living in one neighbourhood arranged for his son to marry a nearby neighbour. Soon after the marriage, the son went to Istanbul to find wage work and to help pay for the bride-price (*başlık*), while his wife continued to live with his parents and farm their lands. Months passed with no contact between the young woman and man. Upon noticing how worried his new *gelin* (bride) had become, Hasan went to the *hoca* to find out if someone had placed a *muska* on his son. The *hoca* said that someone in the village had cast a spell on the son, preventing him from finding work. It was soon after hearing this news from the *hoca* that Hasan received word that his son was laid off from work. Hasan took the bus to Istanbul and brought his son home to visit his wife, thinking that this might ease the tension between the couple. Upon their reunion, the young woman was lead to the belief that her husband had found another woman in Istanbul since he was not interested in "being intimate with her." In an effort to control her husband's unfaithfulness, she went to the *hoca* and asked him to place a love spell (*muhabbet muskasi*) on her husband.

Women, whose lives are so extensively regulated by social forces outside of their immediate control (such as through virilocal residence practices, arranged marriages, restrictions on mobility and paid work efforts, etc.), tend to engage in *büyük* as way to counter their subordination, especially in relations between themselves and their parents, in-laws or husbands. There is the expectation, for instance, that young married women should bear their first child (preferably a male) within the first year of marriage (see also Delaney 1991). However, some village women are unable to meet such moral demands and employ *büyük* (formal and informal) as a way to gain a sense of control over the situation and to overcome

mainstream moral constraints; sometimes this translates into the development of a spell to make a woman's first child a male. Likewise, in cases when parents deny permission for their daughters-in-law to visit natal families or restrict their mobility patterns in other ways (see also Tapper and Tapper 1993; Marcus 1992b; Delaney 1991; Kandiyoti 1987 for similar findings), these women often call upon *hocas* to change this state of affairs. In an effort to have some authority over their social mobility, women sometimes threaten their parents-in-law by saying that they will have a spell cast upon them.

While Sakli's family, marriage and gender relations are entrenched in moral imperatives, the practices of *büyük* are shown here as countermeasures to these strategies of social domination, as they can be employed to systematically challenge the collusion between official Islamic authority and mainstream local morality. The paradox of rural Turkish culture is that while community virtues are continually constituted out of an extensive system of power relations, it is believed that these relations can be *charmingly* subverted.

### Concluding Remarks

This article emphasizes the uses and manipulation of official Islam in the practices of *büyük*, and so presents a culture that is in a continual process of attempting to alter and re-define traditional relations and expectations. In this context, I illustrate how *büyük* provides a means to deal with the many problems villagers face, and to mitigate the fact that much of their life is decided, controlled or influenced by others. Since *büyük* always aims to change the present state of affairs, it does not preserve, defend nor protect anything. It is through *büyük* that villagers seek not only to control their environment, but to dominate it. That is, the goal of *büyük* is not to resist a superior force, but to overcome it through means other than violence. Through the manipulation of meanings, *büyük* 'expresses' the aim of domination by exerting itself against official Islam (or anything posing as the 'last word' or 'final judgement') and subduing its rigid, textualized significance to a variety of other objectives. As an important social and cultural practice, *büyük* adapts the forces of domination and subordination to other uses, and makes everyone 'equally' susceptible to its own forces.

## Acknowledgements

This project was supported, in part, by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (Fellowships Division) and by a Heritage Fund Grant, Carleton University, Ottawa, Canada. I thank Gülen Coskun for helping in the collection of survey data and transcribing some material. I value the critical comments and suggestions of Jacques Chevalier who read earlier versions of this article and the advice of the two anonymous reviewers for *Culture*, but am solely responsible for this final version.

## Notes

1. Even movements (eg. Sufi and Qarmati) that espoused versions of Islam that differed from orthodox Islam were declared heretical and outlawed (Ahmed 1989:144-145).
2. For a review of some of the moral concerns raised in theological and philosophical discussions on Islamic thought, see J. Esposito, *Islam: The Straight Path*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1988:68-115; A. Guillaume, *The Traditions of Islam: An Introduction to the Study of the Hadith Literature*, Beirut, Oxford University Press, 1966; M.G.S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1974; C.A. Qadir, *Philosophy and Science in the Islamic World*, New York, Routledge, 1988; J.I. Smith and Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad, *The Islamic Understanding of Death and Resurrection*, Albany, State University of New York Press, 1981.
3. Leila Ahmed (1989) argues that the constitution of orthodox Islam served particular interests and goals. As she puts it, "orthodox Islam - its laws, its traditions, and its view of history - is the product in the main of the middle and upper classes of the early and Classical epoch (632-1250), and represents their values, culture, and interests" (1989:144).
4. The translation of the Qur'an is by G. Sale and all further citations are from this edition.
5. The prophetic mission of Muhammed was launched after several ecstatic experiences, which in some sense constitute the prelude to the revelation (Eliade, 1985:63-65). Revelations were in turn preceded by long periods of "spiritual retreats" in caverns and other solitary places. In the Qur'an (53:507) it is said that Muhammed received revelations from God directly. "It is no other than a revelation, which hath been revealed unto him. One mighty in power, endued with understanding, taught it him: and he appeared in the highest part of the horizon. Afterwards he approached the prophet, and drew near unto him; until he was the distance of two bows' length from him, or yet nearer: and he revealed unto his servant that which he revealed." Muhammed had seen God a second time near a lote-tree: "his eyesight turned not aside, neither did it wander: and he really beheld some of the greatest signs of his Lord." In other cases, Muhammed received revelations through the Angel Gabriel (Qur'an, 74:559).
6. Lambek (1990) argues that the core of Islam does not rest on belief but centres on an act (largely through words) of submission. In this context, Islam is seen as a "hegemonic ideology" with sacred texts providing the final authority and baseline reference to people's actions.
7. Against the idea that there is "human free will" under Islam, Smith and Haddad (1981) argue that "[e]ven though some verses of the Qur'an apparently suggest an understanding of human free will, the dominant picture is that the affairs of mankind, like all other matters, are completely under God's control. In the traditions this picture is even clearer, and one is hard put to find any *hadiths* supportive of human prerogative" (1981:22).
8. The ancient history of Arabia is particularly important with regards to magic and sorcery. Practices and beliefs inconsistent with Islamic monotheism, for instance, have their root in Arabia and are often referred to as paganistic (Guillaume 1954:8).
9. In Turkey, *hoca* is a term that is commonly employed to refer to religious teachers in general. Unless otherwise stated, *hoca* denotes the most prevalent term that villagers use to refer to religious authorities; they are considered to be knowledgeable in both Islamic thought and magic. In the community of Sakli, there is only one state-employed *imam* (referred to as both *imam* and *hoca*) but there are other, less formal, religious authorities in the community who are referred to as *hoca* as well.
10. See Rolands and Warnier (1988) on their discussion of sorcery as a "levelling mechanism."
11. This article stems from my Ph.D. dissertation, a study dealing with relations of moral domination and subordination in rural Turkish culture. One year of extensive research was spent in a small agricultural community, Sakli (pseudonym), located in the northwestern region of Turkey. The major data produced for this project derive from: eighty-seven formal household interviews; informal interviews, group discussions and oral histories on various topics ranging from marriage to magical practices; participant observation; and archival research. Key informants were particularly helpful in providing additional and detailed information on certain social practices and activities.

12. Organized around the principles of patrilineality and agnatic solidarity, this type of cohabitation also carries with it a strict gender division.
13. Villagers employ the term *büyü* when discussing magic in general. They use the term *muska*, which is a form of *büyü*, to refer specifically to written spells or amulets. Persons who cast spells (considered good or bad) are referred to as *hoca* (lit. religious teacher) and those who undo spells are referred to as *cinci* (meaning the one who does the devil's work).
14. In rural Turkish society, parentally unapproved marriages usually make reference to couples who have eloped or to women who have been 'kidnapped' (*kiz kaçırma*, lit. girl kidnapping). See Sirman 1988; Delaney 1991 for more on this practice.
15. In this society, young married women (especially those who live in their virilocal households) are discouraged from taking their children to visit the community doctor. It is believed by many older women and men (especially the child's paternal grandparents) that such visits cause other people to gossip about the family, especially about the mother's inability to tend to the child's needs.
16. See Delaney's (1990) article on the pilgrimages to Mecca made by Turkish villagers.
17. Virginity is highly valued in this society (see also Delaney 1991; Sirman 1988; Kandiyoti 1977), and everyone is keen to make sure their *gelin* (bride) is a virgin. On the wedding night it is customary for a couple to consummate the marriage while the husband's relatives sit outside the bedroom door. For a woman not to be a virgin on her wedding night can have serious consequences; it is common practice to terminate the marriage and return the woman home to her parents (with or without her clothes).

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