CILGAYAK FESTIVAL AMONG ALTAIC TURKS IN THE CONTEXT OF COLLECTIVE CONSCIOUSNESS AND SENSE OF BELONGING

BİZ BİLİNCİ VE AİDİYET OLGUSU BAĞLAMINDA ALTAY TÜRKLERİNİN CILGAYAK BAYRAMI

Fatih ŞAYHAN*

ABSTRACT: The celebrations / ceremonies / festivals and rituals that bring societies together also make it possible for people who make up a society to have a common historical existence via their deep meaning systems. At these meeting points, humans have the facility to widen and merge with the social horizon that is beyond individual identity. In the social sense, societies uniting around collective consciousness and sense of belonging establish themselves as ontological beings through the memory created by language, communication, objects and ancestors. As a matter of fact, meeting points such as festivals, ceremonies, celebrations and the transitional periods (namely birth, marriage and death) carried out by individual identity in the light of rituals play a dominant role in keeping the common identity alive and transferring it to future generations. The community provides a new dimension to the human relationships that have lost their values through a mythical refinement and renewal process at such times of collective acts. The ritual practices, which are demonstrations of human gains in the social sense accompanied by rituals, are indicative of the extent to which societies grasp time as a cycle of life. The Altai Turks transfer to future generations cultural value systems that they have held in their ancestral memory from the past to the present by means of the celebrations / rituals and festivals that provide national awareness and unity solidified at the moment. They gather under a single roof in ceremonial practices and communication channels, turning to the voice of the unifying spirit of their ancestors. In this context, the most important element of the unity of the Altai Turks in terms of adherence to the values and transferring them to future generations is the Cılga

yak Festival. Cılgayak is "foot/head of the year", which means to set foot in the new year. The Altai Turks celebrate the Cılgayak festival in March, with the melting of the snow, in accordance with the emergence of the new moon. In this regard, Cılgayak festival is noteworthy as it signifies Altai Turks’ adherence to the values and transferring them to future generations. Cılgayak Feast, which is described as awakening of nature, is important in terms of integrating oneself with nature and adding spirit to nature’s vitality. This study will focus on the functions of Cılgayak festival in creating and sustaining national consciousness based on public knowledge creation activities which are gained from periodical field works in the Autonomous Republic of Altai.

Keywords: National consciousness, fact of belonging, Altai Turks, Cılga

yak, ritual.

ÖZ: Toplumları bir araya getiren kutlamalar/törenler ve ritüeller içerisinde barındırdığı derin anlam dizgeleri itibari ile bir toplumu oluşturutan kişilerin ortak tarihsel varlık alanına sahip olmasını sağlar. İnsan, söz konusu buluşma noktalarında bireysel kimlikinden öte toplumsal ufkça açılır. Toplumsal anlamda biz bilinci ve aidiyet duygusu etrafında birleşen toplumlar,
kendilerine dil, iletişim, nesneler ve atalar belleğine dönük ontolojik bir varlık alanı kurarlar. Nitekim bireysel kimliğin kendisini ritüeller işletirken grup kimliğinin içerisinde taşıdığı bayram, tören, kutsal, geçmiş dönemleri olsalar gibi buluşma noktaları ortak kimliğin yaşatılmasında ve gelecek kuşaklara aktarılmasında başat rolü üstlenirler. Topluluk, bu tür buluşma zamanlarında mitik göndergeli bir arımı ve yenilenme sürecinden geçmek ve değer ve character oluşturulan insan ilişkileri yeni bir boyut kazanmasını sağlar. Toplumsal anlamda insanların ritüellerin etkisi altında cinsiyetçi ve geleceğe aktarılan insani kazanma stratejileri olarak, ulusal ve toplumsal öne alınan noktaları korur. Toplumlar, bu tür buluşma zamanlarında mitik göndergeli bir arımı ve yenilenme sürecinden geçmek ve değer ve character oluşturulan insan ilişkileri yeni bir boyut kazanması sağlar. Toplumsal anlamda insanların ritüellerin etkisi altında cinsiyetçi ve geleceğe aktarılan insani kazanma stratejileri olarak, ulusal ve toplumsal öne alınan noktaları korur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Milli bilinç, aidiyet olgusu, Altay Türkleri, Cılgayak bayramı, ritüel.

Introduction:

Collective consciousness, in which a person feels him/herself a social subject –in context of sense of belonging- and a part of the collective opinion beyond being personal, shows that a person reaches the level of historical-existence with typical rituals and practices.

In fact, the past is the most important memory place where historical mind of the nation is hidden as the core part of cultural value system. In this regard, collective consciousness integrates the individual with his/her own intellectual dimension and unique cultural memory, and the history of the society in which he was born and raised. In this context, cultural value systems, which are the shelter of all human gains with their social dimension, provide the integration of the individual with common values by combining the individual with the historical one.

Culture, based on common human experiences, allows people to acquire a historical stance in the social sense. Therefore, culture which embodies the principle of continuity as a system of values, refers to the bond of coexistence of separate individuals who form a society. Societies, united around collective consciousness and sense of belonging, establish themselves as an ontological entity with the help of language, communication, objects and memory of ancestors. As matter of fact, meeting

“Ak tağın cerine ak çeçek kelsin Kökin cerine kök çeçek kelsin...”
points such as religious or cultural festivals, ceremonies, celebrations and transitional periods transferred by individual identity into group identity in the light of rituals, play a leading role in maintaining the common identity and transferring it to future generations. The community provides a new dimension of the long-undermined human relations by a purification mythical reference and renewal process at such times of meeting. These meetings and unions mentioned allow to go beyond the usual flow of daily life and create a happy moments with their unique time frames. Regular repetition of unity and solidarity enables the knowledge and experience of the past to be re-created in the present and expounded to the future. At this point, people who want to avoid the static structure of time open their individual horizons to the social horizon moving around a common ideal. A person, who positions him/herself as a subject of the nation of which s/he is an inseperable part instead of being an irrelevant individual, reaches the essence of existence attained in different spheres of history. At the same time, the person expands the mental boundaries of collective memory by making contact with spiritual existence codes hidden in the deep subconscious through such ritual practices. The ritual practices, which are the presentation of human gains in the social sense accompanied by rituals are indicative of how the societies understand the time in a vital cycle.

The knowledge and experiences of the past become evident when the person becomes an inseperable part of the society. In these moments of the meeting, societies meet with the erecting power of ancestors from previous ages. Therefore, these uniting practices provide us with exemplary reflections from the realities/phenomena of history in such a way as to trigger original reactions of societies against hardships of life. The Altai Turks position their cultural value systems in the memory of their ancestors from the past to the present thanks to the celebrations which help enhance national awareness and unity, as well.

**About Cılgayak Festival**

One of the most important factors of unity in terms of adherence to the values of the Altai Turks and transferring these values to the future generations is the Cılgayak Festival, indeed. For Altai Turks, Cılgayak Festival means a holy time period in which nature and human beings get integrated rather than simply the coming of spring. For this reason, Cılgayak Festival is regarded as the beginning of abundance of health, physical and spiritual purification, in recognition of the system of values in the form of happy beginnings. “Cılgayak” means ‘foot/beginning of the year’ which is setting foot in to the new year. Altai Turks celebrate the Cılgayak Festival in March -when snow starts to melt- in accordance with the emergence of the new moon. Cılgayak, which is defined as the awakening of nature, is regarded as very important in the spiritual perceptions of Altai Turks. According to Altai Turks, every Cılgayak Festival the land hosts human
beings (Source-1). Cilgayak is also interpreted as the opening of the voice of nature to the external world. In a sense, Cilgayak Festival described as awakening of nature is important in terms of integrating human being with nature and accompanying his soul to the vitality of nature.

“Cilan uyasından çıktı,
Cer curtkanın açtı,
Ayıldın içinde tulaan eşikte turbas.” (Source-2, Source-3)
The snake came out of its nest,
Opened its quilt,
Goods at home, not on the door sill.

Common meeting points like celebrations, ceremonies and rituals ensure that community-residing persons have a common historical existence with their deep meaning systems. Altai Turks make preparations for Cilgayak months in advance. A few days before the ceremony, streets, barns, and all houses are cleaned. As soon as February ends, Cilgayak Festival is celebrated on the top of a high mountain in March in accordance with the birth of the new moon. All Altai Turks, and especially those in Mountainous Altai, Ongudays of Altai Autonomous Republic, like Ulagans, Maymas, Koş Ağac, Kôksu Oozis, Kan-Oozis, Şabalins, Çoys, Çamals and Turaçaks participate in ceremonies with utmost care and zest. When ceremony time is up, fire is made and milk, oats and butterfat are dusted with blessings (prayers) by the person influential (female or male) who has the spirit of ‘kamlik’ among the participants.

“Cilgayak cil ekeldi!
Cıl tu, cilu bol!
New year has came Cılgayak!
(Warcer, be warmer!
The snow melts,
Let nature show itself,
Let the fields get plowed,
Let the water cascade from stream bed!
Cıl gayak! Cıl gayak! New year may come!
And birds may sing.)

“Cıl gayak, Cıl gayak,
Cıl ötkönniñ bayramı!
Caşöskürim çirgali,
Cas kelgenniñ kököni.
Caskı künniñ cart çogi
Catkan kardi kayıltar.
Caruş öndü kuştaris
Canıp keler Alayıga!” (Ukaçına and Yamaeva, 1993: 71; Source 4)
It is a festival year-end!
The joy of youth,
Herald the coming of spring,
Herald the coming of first day
Melts the snow.
Sweet-voiced birds
Turn back to Altai!)

One of the most important celebration of Çılgayak times is blessing the power of fire keeper/watcher to respect the cult. So, fire functions as spiritual purification and regeneration. At the same time, the blessing to the power of fire is accomplished to remove evil spirits and evil elements. Altai Turks perform the rituals traditionally as number (1, 3, 5, 7, 9) identified with bad souls in blessed ceremonies around a fire set at the top of a high mountain. There is no specific number of the relevant rituals. More rituals means more evil spirits will be outcast.

The meanings of ‘signifient’ hidden behind ‘indicative’ in terms of semiology of Altai Turks is an expression of their perspective about the universe, nature and objects beyond the visible world. This is the expression of the desire to create a space of existence by imposing a world of symbolic meaning on things that physically exist. In order to create the ambiance of historical existence, Altai Turks meet in the mountains that hail the spirit of ancestors during the Çulgayak Festival and broadening the boundaries of the cosmic universe by opening their individual identities to social universe. Mythical thoughts are revived in ceremonies. Mythical thoughts serve to keep alive such experiences from the past to the present. As a traditional performance, such associations become a spiritual creation in memories-transforming and changing themselves in time, but not dissappearing- and take place in the common consciousness. Altai Turks behave with great respect to water and soil spirits, and the other elements of nature which have generated and will generate them. They handle what life offers to humans as opportunities and generate them with great respect in a deep conscious and they bless the elements of nature with magic of the sacred. The magic of the sacred gives change a cognitive perception of environment and life and combines them with the power of the word at the meeting points where the social spirit is revived. Altai Turks struggle for life against a long and strenuous winter, and consider of rebirth of nature as the first day of the year. Thanks to the applause that is combined with the power of the word, the arrival of the new year is blessed in the festival.

“Üç-Kurbustan Kudayım!
Ulu alkaş beriger.
Ürlü mal cil çığıp,
Üstü aşiş tügenbezin!
Altay-Kuday alış berzeer!
Ak malibis koroboy,
Amır, çakşi çal çıksın!
Ak bıyanibis ooribazın,
Ak südibis tügenbezin.
Alkı boyıs ooribay,
Amır, çakşi çal çığak!
Kazan-ayak kaymaktu,
Kelin-keçin omok bolzın!
Ercineli çımalı curt
Ercine biske bezgeler
Eldiň-conniň ooruzı
Eski karla cogolzın.
Kubulgazın cuuktatpay,
Kuday, biske, boluşsaar?!
Cer-kindigi enebis!
Kös cetpesteň körzögör,
Ukpas cerdeň uksagar.
Baştaň baş bolzın!
Bazıp öskön Altayıs!”  (Ukaçina and Yamaeva, 1993: 67-68).
(Three Kurbustan¹ Kudayım
Make great clapping
Don’t run out of goods
And food at the end of the year!
Altai-Kuday applauds!
Don’t run out of our goods,
Get a beautiful and peaceful year!
Our white flavour don’t get worst,
Don’t run out of our white milk.
Our goods don’t be taken ill,
Get a beautiful and peaceful year!
May pots and pans be creamy,
And visitors are healthy!
Precious and holy dormitory

¹ Intermediary spirit believed to provide communication between God and Erlik.
Appreciates us.
Illness of nation
Should disappear with old snow.
May the separated ones get closer
Kuday be with us!
Owner of land, our mother!
Managed to see what eyes can not see,
Managed to hear of the unheard place.
May our prayers come true!
Ever-gathering Altai Turks!

In addition to the Cılgayak Festival; Altai Turks celebrate the New Year’s Day, which they call Çağa Festival in January. Altai Turks celebrate the Çağa Festival in their homes because the weather is very cold. Both the El Oyn and the Cılgayak Festival and Çağa Festival are remarkable in that Altai Turks stick to their values and pass them on to future generations.

Tending to the voice of unifying spirit of their ancestors, Altai Turks gather under a single roof in ritual practices and communication channels. By looking at common national identity, they take a vital stance against external threats by establishing cultural existence areas for themselves. Altai Turks, who have been besieged and deprived of a national unity so far, feel the unifying voices of their ancestors at common points of unification and maintain inclusive and holistic stance with conscious language and identity against ever-lasting threats to estrange their self-values.

**Conclusion**

Altai Turks who perceive and re-animate the universe in a holistic rhythm, reveal their national unity and solidarity at the meeting points where they come together. So, at the time of Cılgayak Festival, Altai Turks gathering in the mountains carry on the spirit of ancestors, pushing the limits of the cosmic universe by opening their individual identities to social horizon. Altai Turks come into contact with the spirit of their ancestors and feel mentally unified thanks to Cılgayak, Çağa and El Oyn Festivals, and through these festivals they achieve collective consciousness. The festivals mentioned and the rituals keeping customs alive unite individuals in terms of collective consciousness. On one hand, they remind Altai Turks of their commitment to common rules and values, and on the other they engrain in self-consciousness based on the memories of the common past. From this viewpoint, Altai Turks who experience the sense of social spirit through such rituals, confront the historical transformations and create culturally and spiritually rich and happy periods in the flow of time.
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Oral Source

*Source 1:* Gögo Talkıbayef, Date of birth 1956, Autonomous Republic of Altai, Koşağacı Aymağı, place of birth Beltir Village, kam. Date of meeting: 12.07.2012.

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*Source 4:* Mariya Mihaylovna, Date of birth 1927, Autonomous Republic of Altai, Ulagan Aymağı, place of birth Ulagan, farmer, Date of meeting: 10.07.2012.