

READING THE SHAPING EFFECTS OF MYTHS ON SOCIETY AROUND THE CONCEPT OF SOCIAL ENGINEERING: THE CASE OF ALTAI CREATION MYTH

UĞUR DURMAZ

ABSTRACT

In this article, the *Altai Creation Myth* compiled by Wilhelm Radloff will be analyzed around the concept of social engineering, as used in social sciences. The aforementioned texts collection was preferred because it is widely known and contains a wide processing. In the light of the expressions in the myth text, it will be discussed whether the creators of this structure had any attempt to direct or shape the society. In the light of questions such as why myths are produced by the society, how they are used, how they affect the group structure, it will be investigated whether social control is attempted to be achieved and whether an engineering is applied to the society as a result. As a result of these discussions, myths will be read differently from an interdisciplinary perspective and the results of what kind of effects such products have on primitive people will be explained.

Keywords: Myth, Altai Creation Myth, Social Control, Social Engineering, Folklore.

INTRODUCTION

Communities have internal and external factors in forming their unique characteristics. Group, people, community, society, nation, etc. united around a common goal. A number of elements that enable this unification of people called by many names or that distinguish them from other people have come from the past to the present. In the process of shaping the society, many internal and external factors such as geography, nature, climate, war, religion, education have been effective, while some of these factors have influenced spontaneous formation and change, while others have progressed under the leadership of a person or group around various benefits or interests. While there are many elements for influencing or being influenced in the limitlessness of communication possibilities for today's world, it can also be said that in the past, these had limited possibilities that could affect limited circles. At this point, it is clear that folklore elements are at the forefront in the formation of the unique characteristics of societies. Among these, social norms such as traditions, customs, habits and customs can be considered to be priority areas, but it is possible to see the narratives created by oral culture in the

basic structure that enables the formation and spread of these social norms. Therefore, myths in anonymous literature are important products for analyzing the shaping or engineering of society.

Societies have experienced transitions through the stages that constitute their unique structures in the time it has taken to reach their current state. While these transitions sometimes proceed around necessities in line with needs and conditions, sometimes they are realized with certain directions. The first term that comes to mind at the point of making these directives in a systematic way is social engineering. Social engineering can be defined as “a social discipline applied by states or any private structure/institution/individual; it can be expressed as the entire effort to influence social behaviors, attitudes and resources on a large scale.”¹ The fact that the term engineering, which is a mechanical term, is mentioned in the social sciences inevitably creates the idea that this term is used to build a more technical structure. Of course, the systematic shaping of societies can be done around certain mathematical systems in today’s world, but one of the most important fields that have helped to do this in a softer way from the past to the present is literature and art. At this point, social engineering can shape artistic activities, products, formations and the societies that produce and use them within their own world of ideas. “Social engineering has clear goals such as making changes in the demographic, social texture and historical structure of the society, directing and controlling its reactions, feelings, thoughts and desires. Within the framework of the task that we can call social engineering, the artist/writer also proposes models for the desired change and prepares the intellectual infrastructure in society.”²

In general, it is quite natural that in addition to some works of art produced by societies with aesthetic concerns, products that are produced about issues of general interest and cost the public are also evaluated under this category. There is definitely a producer of these products before the anonymization process, and it is highly likely that these producers have produced these products according to the general opinion of that period or according to their needs and wishes. The fact that these products have been accepted by the majority and passed down to this day, even if their names are not known, is an indication that the ideas, feelings and expressions in the products are accepted or have been accepted. Naturally, although it is not easy to demonstrate that this was done in a systematic way, it is seen that this was done with a systematic approach, especially in the genres created to exhibit the prototype, to show the exemplary structure, to convey the creation and to guide people with the reward-punishment mechanism, which we encounter in the readings around myths. At this point, the idea of keeping society under control is important for the purpose of managing the masses and keeping them together. At this point, the terms social control and propaganda, which are other auxiliary concepts that help to shape the individual and society according to the wishes, are also frequently used structures.

¹ Oğuzcan, 2023, p. 52.

² Kefeli, 2013, p. 28.

The concept of social control is a term used in many fields of social sciences and is generally used to shape the social structure, to keep the society away from determined bad practices or to direct the group where necessary. Social control is defined as the influence of society on the individual for certain behaviors, the regulation of the behavior of individuals and groups, the tools and situations used to maintain and maintain order or prevent deviant behaviors.³ Social control is also a means for people to come together and effectively achieve a sense of unity. Individuals accept and internalize the rules that are prominent in the community they belong to in order to gain access to the layers that are considered valuable according to the rules of the community. Through social control, individuals learn and transmit social norms and become united with the group.⁴ For this reason, social control is frequently used in the infrastructure as a means of enforcement in the social engineering structure. In general terms, it is seen as one of the main factors that ensure the control of the community within the framework of the rules determined in the operation of the reward-punishment mechanism.

Propaganda, another tool used to shape society, is one of the methods used both to manage the functioning of social control and to direct society more consciously and quickly towards the desired direction. "Propaganda is a conscious manipulation aimed at influencing individuals and controlling their behavior".⁵ The most important constructive identity in the functioning of propaganda is the authorities. Structures that emerge from the social structure and become intellectual leaders in ensuring structures such as order, harmony, prosperity and continuity in social life are accepted as authorities.⁶ Individuals, institutions, beliefs, etc. that are considered authorities can consciously direct people to their own thoughts, ideas or actions in order to strengthen and maintain their power. This situation is transmitted to people from higher positions in turn, and a consensus is formed that spreads from the lowest to the highest level of society.⁷ Propaganda, which feeds and facilitates social control mechanisms that stand as auxiliary elements of social engineering in shaping and managing society, has been used effectively from the past to the present. From this point of view, it is possible to examine the situation of the use of propaganda with social control mechanisms in myths, which are the first oral narratives of humanity, both in terms of engineering moves that shape the society and adapt it to the desired structure, and in the emergence and maintenance of norms such as traditions, customs, beliefs and practices that will be accepted by the general public.

1. PROMINENT FUNCTIONS OF MYTHS AS A SHAPER OF SOCIETY

Myths, which are the oldest of the oral culture products produced in human history from the primitive period until today, meet many needs of the society in general. As a result of the answers produced in the face of these needs, the function

³ Ün, 2022, p. 2.

⁴ Azimli & Coşun, 2023, p. 3.

⁵ Atabek, 2003, p. 5.

⁶ Büyükokutan Töret, 2017, p. 199.

⁷ Krech & Crutchfield, 1980, p. 279.

varies in the balance of need. Myths, which emphasize a few noteworthy points in the production of answers to the curiosity, fear, anxiety and expectations of primitive man, have generally emphasized the issues of scientific knowledge and belief, while influencing and shaping society through them.

When considering the connection between myths and scientific knowledge, it would be more accurate to adopt a perspective related to the contextual aspect and the requirements of the time, rather than a perspective in today's sense. Myths are clearly the result of the scientific curiosity of the primitive, especially in the sense that the structure that scientific knowledge responds to in today's sense helps to establish a cause-and-effect relationship in a more primitive way but with basically similar purposes. When we answer the questions of what, where, when, how, why and who in the context of today's experiments, observations and experiences, it is possible to say that primitive man sought answers to his inquiries out of fear and curiosity and found them in myths in a half-real, half-extraordinary way. At this point, myths are primitive man's interpretation and transmission of mysterious structures through symbols. In this way, it should be said that it not only makes sense of external events but also begins to form the meaning world of its own social structure and to ensure the formation of certain rules and acceptances.⁸ Although Malinowski⁹ defines myths as products that increase belief as well as daily utility rather than explanations aimed at satisfying scientific interest, even in doing so, the fact that myths seek answers to questions in general terms and establish rules as a result of reaching certain conclusions from there is a sign of an effort to make sense of the world and adapt to it. The fact that the human being who produces and uses myth has started to systematize all the important events that are important for his own life, no matter how small or big, to put them into rules, and his effort to make sense of the order around him has automatically brought him into the scientific framework.¹⁰ In this context, myths have a socially engineering and directing structure that shapes groups, societies and nations that enable the realization of shaping in the structure extending from individual to social.

When we look at the answers myths give to questions, it will be seen that the supernatural dominates. Of course, it is understandable that the production of knowledge is far from rationality in societies where the possibilities and methods within today's scientific framework are not developed. It is precisely here that the second area of emphasis of myths, belief and religious structure, emerges. When the groups that produced and used myths could not find a solution to their problems, they aimed to solve the problem by resorting to beings or entities whose existence is accepted in the transphysical structure. The main reason why the belief structure is so dominant in myths is perhaps the helplessness brought about by the limited possibilities here. As a result, primitive man tried to make his daily life more meaningful by involving extraordinary structures in order not to leave questions unanswered.

⁸ Bayat, 2005, p. 4.

⁹ Malinowski, 1998, p. 103.

¹⁰ Eliade, 2001, p. 21.

The connection of myths with belief and religion is one of their most important functions. Myths have been the answer to many questions as a result of the need to believe in the process of making sense of the world, especially for primitive man. Not only does it create a sense of curiosity, but it also supports various rituals and belief elements while providing social order by showing the influence of today's religions with this feature.¹¹ However, it is also clear that among the belief systems in primitive times, myths clearly did not constitute as systematic a structure as they do today. Of course, myths had some sanction or influence for the groups that knew and accepted this, but myths were more of a guiding principle in terms of giving meaning to the actions taken and providing a benefit in terms of foreseeing what might happen.¹² Thanks to their structures that can be evaluated from different perspectives, myths stand out and are used philosophically as a source of scientific knowledge and religiously as an example of the world of images, symbols and icons that convey the origin of life.¹³ From this point of view, it is known that myths are valuable in terms of belief for the societies that accept and use them in the process from ancient man to the present day, that they create various taboos, and that they also show people the aspects they should pay attention to in their lives as a guide. In fact, when this belief structure of myths is considered as a religion for certain societies, it forms the infrastructure of various beliefs in the process that remains to this day. Although the new religions replacing the old religions push them back, the minds of the people cannot act so quickly and sharply. For this reason, it is possible to see the returns of the myth world in social norms such as traditions, customs and traditions in the formation of folk beliefs in social memory.¹⁴ One reason why myths have such a contemporary impact is that they have fundamentally similar functions to the religious beliefs prevalent today. In order to make sense of the unknown world or the divine world, myths had the same purpose, just as today's religions provide examples or symbols. In both structures, the scarcity of explicit knowledge is striking, but the aim is to provide it through symbols and symbols that rely on interpretation to reach the truth.¹⁵ As a result of all this, myths form not only the belief structure of the individual world but also the belief structure of social groups and nations, affecting their lives and even shaping them clearly. The narratives that enter the mind through these texts settle here and help shape the lives of the believers, form the behavioral patterns of the group, help the authorities to gain administrative power or help people to shape themselves by entering into certain expectations.¹⁶

Social studies have shown that the shaping of humanity goes back to prehistoric times, when various ideas were given to society, and society was guided and changed.¹⁷ The consciousness of being a group has been effective in the

¹¹ Malinowski, 1998, p. 103.

¹² Park & Burgess, 2017, p. 117.

¹³ Sivri, 2022, p. 51.

¹⁴ Azimli & Coşun, 2023, p. 9.

¹⁵ Bayat, 2005, p. 79.

¹⁶ Göka, 2006, p. 63-64.

¹⁷ Oğuzcan, 2023, p. 53.

transition of people from individual to social structure, which means not only a certain mass, but also a group of people gathered around common goals and accepting similar things.¹⁸ As can be understood from this definition, in order to become a group, the commonalities of the community need to be found or produced. This is where social forming or engineering comes into play. The ability to manage or control the shaped society from a point can also be realized with the help of similar tools. Myths have become a shaping element as a result of these functions they fulfill in the societies they live in. It can be seen that society is also shaped in the light of different factors with myths becoming a guide or model by setting an example for people.¹⁹ Myths help people understand the relationship between the present and the past in their mental perception, and they are also products that can be examined in terms of seeing the formation codes of a community in a cultural sense. They are ideal narratives in terms of understanding the transformation, change and shaping of the cultural heritage of the community of interest from past to present.²⁰ Through the example of the Altai creation myth, the elements that shaped and guided the lives of the Turks in the primitive period will be examined and the questions of how oral culture products can be used in terms of social engineering and whether it is possible to direct communities in the desired way will be addressed.

2. THE IMPACT OF THE ALTAI CREATION MYTH IN SHAPING AND CONTROLLING SOCIETY

The Altai creation myth is an important piece of Turkish culture that has survived from the first examples of oral culture. This text, which has all the general characteristics of myths, basically describes the creation of the universe, the world and human beings, and conveys a series of events between God and Devil (Erlık) around the conflict of good and evil. A closer look at the structure of the text reveals messages and directions given to both individuals and society. At the same time, it is seen that the text makes certain contributions in order to find answers to the questions in the minds of primitive people. At this point, two main points will be mentioned in the analysis of the text in terms of social engineering. The first of these is the commands and prohibitions or recommendations put forward socially on the basis of belief, their transmission structure and their impact on social transformation, and the second is how the society is shaped around a certain view while accumulating knowledge with the answers given to the questions about what and how to satisfy the sense of curiosity of primitive people.

Myths show their most dominant characteristic feature by carrying the elements of belief within the social structure. This makes them not just ordinary narratives, but guiding texts that shape society's need to believe and help it develop in certain situations. In particular, they enable the formation of many basic principles such as aspirations, expectations, beliefs, ideologies and morals, not of

¹⁸ Kağıtçıbaşı & Cemalcılar, 2014, p. 271.

¹⁹ Eliade, 2001, p. 12.

²⁰ Sivri, 2022, p. 50.

individuals, but rather of society or, in other words, of a collective structure. For this reason, the ceremonial, ritualistic structure of the first myths stands out in a very dominant way.²¹ Societies that come together on the axis of belief and use the myth as a guiding light constitute the group structure in social sciences. For communities shaped around group consciousness, the guiding elements such as leader, leader, sacred text, symbolic structure, etc. are unchangeable, tabooed and obligatory to be accepted. Myths are one of the effective elements that enable primitive human groups to stay together, and through them, society can be shaped in line with the wishes of the dominant structure or within the scope of the group's effective power.²² In this context, the Altai creation myth provides examples of good and evil, right and wrong, reward and punishment, or in today's common usage, good deeds and sins, for the communities that accept it.

Although the Altai creation myth appears to be a dualistic system, the phrase "True God" emphasized at the beginning reveals the existence of a unidirectional power while emphasizing the inadequacy of the power of others.

"A wind came up, boiling the waters/ He (Devil) angered God by splashing it on his face/ He (Devil) thought mankind had become one with it/ I have become very powerful, I have become superior to God..."²³

The state of showing superiority emphasized in this passage shows us the first signs of the character structure of the man who will turn into Erlik (Devil) in the rest of the text. Attitudes such as angering God and considering oneself superior to God are clearly an indication of a mistake on the plane of belief. With the emphasis here on the superiority of God, the punishment for angering God is revealed in the following section and constitutes the basic theme of the myth.

In certain parts of the text, God's characteristics are presented to people in the form of intermediate sentences. Instead of presenting them as a list in order, the text relates them to the subject matter wherever necessary and draws the boundaries of human daily life at certain points. The belief that God sees, hears and knows everything, which are also seen in the Abrahamic religions today and which serve to keep the society under control, are also given in the text, thus ensuring that the belief world and social life of primitive people proceed in a certain order. In total, six characteristics are presented as attributes of God. These six characteristics are still valid in today's beliefs. These are: God is everywhere, God knows everything, God commands and is obeyed, God is the only and most powerful, God is forgiving, God sees everything:

(God is everywhere)

"Oh, I'm saved from God," he thinks./ He looked around and found God ready"²⁴

(God knows everything)

"No one knows what God's thought was/ So that the descendants may be descended, he gave orders like this"²⁵

²¹ Bayat, 2005, p. 7.

²² Kağıtçıbaşı & Cemalcılar, 2014, p. 271-272.

²³ Ögel, 2010, p. 451.

²⁴ Ögel, 2010, p. 452.

²⁵ Ögel, 2010, p. 453.

(God Commands and is obeyed)

“We eat from these branches, God commanded it,/ We are his servants, our God said so/ God told us to see these four branches/ Don’t eat any of it, don’t touch your lips”²⁶

(God is only and the most powerful)

“Hearing Mandı Şire, God stood up and said:/ “Fear not, O Mandı-Şire, there is none stronger than me.”²⁷

*(God is forgiving)*²⁸

“God said, laughing: Take this place,/ No more than the tip of the stick”²⁹

(God sees everything)

“My eyes see all goodness/ And I never lose sight of them, wipe their evil”³⁰

These emphasized characteristics are similar to contemporary belief systems and reflect the perception that it is not possible to do anything hidden from God. This is inevitably a useful way of showing that individuals are socially monitored, that what they do is recorded, and that somehow they will be punished or rewarded for it. The emphasized perception of surveillance is also an indication that religion is used as an important tool of control. Especially for individuals who are more sensitive on the axis of belief, it is easier to ensure that they comply with certain social rules by utilizing this aspect, which is why religion/faith is a good social control tool from past to present.³¹ These characteristics given about God will pave the way for the formation of a certain social structure in the new world perception formed in people’s minds, as well as paving the way for self-control. In the society to be shaped in terms of social engineering, belief systems provide both internal and external control. The characteristics attributed to God also serve the functions of easy control of the community and removal of deviant behaviors, which are aimed by social control mechanisms. Individuals who want to be included in the group during the socialization process accept this text as an example and sacred text and begin to apply what is described here to their own lives. These characteristics of God prevent the person from doing wrong by dragging him/her into an internal conflict, and enable the society to gain the right to judge and decide on the person’s actions. Thus, by showing the limits of what is right, the socialization process is paved the way for the socialization process to proceed faster by forming the concept of conscience, which will not only control the person with a social structure but also control himself/herself.³²

²⁶ Ögel, 2010, p. 454.

²⁷ Ögel, 2010, p. 459.

²⁸ It is possible to see his forgiveness in three places in the text. Despite Devil’s evil deeds, it is seen that he forgives him three times and gives him a chance. The first time was after he took soil in his mouth and tried to create soil for himself, the second time after he deceived man, and the third time, as in the example given here, although his whole order was destroyed, he still gave him a place from his own floor. The similarity between the idea of “God’s right is three”, which still exists among the people today, and the trinity here is also striking.

²⁹ Ögel, 2010, p. 461.

³⁰ Ögel, 2010, p. 463.

³¹ Azimli & Coşun, 2023, p. 2.

³² Özdemir, 2023, p. 43; Azimli & Coşun, 2023, p. 8-9.

After this general information about God at the beginning, the text sends a direct message to humans and categorizes them. This categorization is related to the choice of being a party to the God-Erlík (Devil) struggle. In the following words spoken by God, certain rules are laid down around the emphasis on good and bad people:

“With your evil thought, now you have become a sinner/ You filled me with bad feelings for evil/ May your people always keep it in you/ So be it with them, as you’ve told me./ My people, on the other hand, always think clean/ Their eyes see the sun, their souls are bright/ .../ Let those who hide crimes from me be your people/ Let the sinful ones be your property/ Let him who escapes your guilt come and serve me/ Let him who hides his sin come and take refuge in me.”³³

This section, where the conflict between God and Erlík is seen most clearly for the first time while the shape of sinfulness is described, is a warning for the societies using the text. While elements such as bad thinking, evil, hiding crimes are seen as signs of sinfulness, qualities such as clean thinking, emphasis on light, and staying away from the devil are listed as signs of being a good person. The engineering structure used to shape the society has especially activated social control mechanisms here. The main function of social control is to prevent behaviors that are seen as deviations and to develop attitudes against them. This is the ideal method both to reduce the conflict between individuals and to ensure that they can integrate more easily into society.³⁴ “Social control defines people’s deviant behavior. Social control facilitates the identification of a behavior as deviance. Deviance can be expressed as norm violation. Social control does not identify with all processes that contribute to order, but with limited efforts to respond to deviant behavior.”³⁵ As can be seen in the passage, it is not aimed to bring order to an entire social structure, but simply to plant the concepts of good and evil in the minds of the society with a simple classification. As a result, the people who use the text are guided by explaining what deviant behaviors are, as well as the opposite situations.

In the following parts of the text, the characteristics of God and the things to be possessed or avoided in order to be close to him are frequently repeated in the same order. One of the points that is particularly emphasized is the idea that things that are bad, ugly, irregular, broken, defective, incomplete or naked in appearance are not good, are not approved by God and should be avoided:

“A tree left naked, without a limb./ Not pleasing to the eyes, unpleasant to look at!”³⁶

“In this very age, people were hairy/ When they tasted this fruit, the hairs fell out./ Both of them were left hairless, clothesless, naked./ They were embarrassed and looked for a place to hide.”³⁷

“Before this there was neither rock nor stone in the world,/ Nor was there a towering mountain like now/ The devil’s been fighting with fragments falling from the

³³ Ögel, 2010, p. 452.

³⁴ Azimli & Coşun, 2023, p. 5.

³⁵ Özdemir, 2023, p. 43.

³⁶ Ögel, 2010, p. 453.

³⁷ Ögel, 2010, p. 456.

heavens/ The world has become mixed with rocks and stones/ The world is full of mountains and hills/ The mountains became steep and steep with slopes all around/ What happened to our world when it was flat/ This is how God's creation was ruined."³⁸

These three passages from the text are generally sufficient to understand the emphasis on corruption throughout the text. Although the text can be read as an exemplary narrative based on the creation of human beings and objects in the world and the realization of the first sin, when we look at the sub-meanings, with the help of repeated perceptions such as nudity, ugliness, deformity, it performs a mind coding to the society and emphasizes that such situations are negative, bad or the work of Devil. For this reason, social engineering is practiced by equating going naked, disrupting order and opposing the existing order with sin and Devil. For those who see the text as a part of their daily lives, it becomes a list of do's and don'ts. Faith is known to be one of the most important factors in determining the general structure of elements with harsh sanctions such as traditions, customs and regulations in the formation of social norms. The interaction between beliefs and norms also affects the formation of the cultural and historical identity of the society.³⁹ And it is with this kind of list that the foundation of the mold forms of social norms is laid.

The Altai creation myth emphasizes some of the issues in people's daily lives and puts forward behaviors that are accepted or rejected within the framework of good deeds and sins as warnings from the divine power. It includes the idea that these are based on the perception of collaborating with Devil, or that those who do these things become open targets of Devil and become alienated from God by taking his side. Erlik's request for humans and God's refusal to accept this and Erlik's actions to take humans are presented as examples in this respect:

"...I also robbed, deceived and stole again/ I even dropped the one who ran away on a horse./ I put mischief in the heart of those who drink raki./ I took the life of the man who fought with man./ And I will take the minds of those who enter the water./ I'll dunk you in the water and take your life!/ Those who climb the tree, those who climb the rock./ I'll slip him off his feet and throw him to his death."⁴⁰

In this passage, when we look at what devil does, we will see that some of the behaviors that will cause the breakdown of social order are listed. While stealing, drinking, fighting seem to be the most critical of these, warnings are also given to people on an individual basis, emphasizing the idea that one should be careful when entering water and be cautious when climbing high places. Even today, when we look at the beliefs about water, trees and mountains in folk beliefs that exist in daily life, the idea that there are situations that should be cautious continues. The text shows the effect of the elements mentioned here on Erlik, who does the same, in the following section. The death of the people called the devil's people by being thrown out of the sky happened by fulfilling some of

³⁸ Ögel, 2010, p. 460.

³⁹ Park & Burgess, 2017, p. 143.

⁴⁰ Ögel, 2010, p. 457-458.

the conditions mentioned above. Some of them drown in the water, some of them fall to their deaths from the top of a tree, some of them hit a stone and in this way Erlik's people are seen to be destroyed, again emphasizing the sub-meaning of how careful one should be when saying or doing something. The effects and reactions of actions are carried out in such a way that they are reciprocal, which dictates both the idea that God is just as an attribute and that society should be careful in its actions.

In the later parts of the text, it also gives messages about the emergence of certain taboos and what are the unforgivable crimes. Especially in the part where God disconnects from humanity, his words to the helper spirits can be seen as socially formative. These words to a helper spirit named Şal Yime are as follows:

“You protect people, who die a good death,/ I won't accept anyone who kills himself/
To serve God, to serve the Khan/ To fight and die in battle, to die in service/ You
gather people to bring them to me.”⁴¹

Suicide is the most important prohibition in this section on the afterlife. Killing oneself is shown as a situation that is absolutely unacceptable to God, but another point that is particularly emphasized in the section on deaths is the criteria of service to God, service to the ruler, and service to the country, which are presented as good deaths or acceptable reasons for death. This section clearly exemplifies the concept of propaganda, which is still used as the most effective tool for social engineering, and how society is manipulated through its use. Propaganda, although it seems to be a term of today's society, it is accepted that it has been used since the period when the word was effective in the historical process.⁴² At this point, in societies where the shaping effect of belief is strong, propaganda is used by the person, institution, thought or belief, which is usually the ruler or leader or authority of that society, rather than a collective structure in the social sense, to direct the society for a certain interest or situation. And it does this by creating taboos, by leading people away from them or to do the opposite.⁴³ When we look at the text, while death is forbidden as a personal choice, it has turned into a celebrated event when it is for God, then for the political power holder and then for the homeland. The message given to the society is clearly that it is acceptable and even good to die for the ruling class. In this way, while the masses are forbidden from killing themselves, they are willing to die at the behest or request of someone else. Later on in the text, even the existence of God is attributed to the existence of the Khan, and a kind of cult of the holy leader is created by saying, “So that the Great God may be at the head of the Khan”. This inevitably develops a certain pressure and compulsion on the people, and can be interpreted as meaning that what is done to the leader is considered to be done to God, that one must obey him or her and even die for him or her when necessary. As a result, such discourses, which can be used for propaganda purposes, can turn into a structure that forces people to do even the things they do not want to do by putting them under mental

⁴¹ Ögel, 2010, p. 463.

⁴² Atabek, 2003, p. 5.

⁴³ Park & Burgess, 2017, p. 143.

pressure.⁴⁴ The fact that this kind of emphasis is made towards the end of the text reveals that social engineering, social control mechanisms and propaganda are used effectively in myth texts. It is also possible to see a similar structure in another section:

“You will always remember my name when your body is strong/ Don’t make someone else do it, as long as you know the bad thing/ Equal inheritance for all/ May orphans benefit, may they find equality with all/ .../ Everything went well, by God’s word,/ Everything went well, with God’s advice/ .../ Do not go out of the way, learned from God/ This is the origin of power, coming to us from God”⁴⁵

As can be seen, while emphasizing the world order, it is advised to maintain the order and never go out of the way or even resist authority. As a worldly practice, it is emphasized that inheritance should be shared equally, behaviors that would lead to injustice should be avoided, or that one should not impose on others what one has not done on oneself. The main reason for this is that the order of belief also affects social custom and this is of key importance for the survival of society. In the line from the holy being to the holy person to the holy state, disobeying any of these means not fulfilling one’s responsibility to the top.⁴⁶ At this point, it can be seen that individual control becomes easier in the process of shaping society and that people are forced to put themselves into certain molds both from the outside and from their minds. While the person is asked to accept these unconditionally, the fact that there is no possibility to reject them is supported by putting a full stop at the end with the previously given parts.

Myths, even though they are commonly faith-based elements and try to offer something to the society in this way, they also enable primitive people to form their mind world and continue their daily life by showing the source of the things they do not know. The situation to be mentioned here does not correspond to scientific knowledge in today’s sense, but it is a knowledge structure that was created to enable primitive man to understand things more easily and to live properly by answering questions such as how, why and what. In this context, it seems possible for primitive man to make sense of himself, his environment and what is happening with the help of myths and to shape, direct and control culture and life in social terms.

Myths automatically constitute a mass of information in terms of their content in terms of telling the beginning/creation. As a whole of answers to the questions of primitive man about the creation of the place where s/he lived, himself/herself and his/her environment, shaped around the sense of curiosity, myth texts have met the need to know for many years. This is the case not just for one nation, but for all ancient societies, and in a cumulative mass, it affects even today. “The fact that myths are transformed and repeated in literary works is an indication that humanity and the depths of the human soul are based on a common past. In other words, we can easily say that myths are a universe and human design

⁴⁴ Büyükokutan Töret, 2017, p. 199.

⁴⁵ Ögel, 2010, p. 464-465.

⁴⁶ Park & Burgess, 2017, p. 118.

and software. They are almost a database and are passed down from generation to generation through software updates by accumulating data.”⁴⁷ The accumulation of knowledge created by myths is still encountered in oral culture products that continue today as folk beliefs and in narratives among the people. In the Altai creation myth, the creation of many elements from the universe to human beings, from landforms to animals is described. From the beginning of the text, it is possible to see the process of creation in order. First of all, the answer to the question of what existed when there was nothing is given as follows:

“When the earth was the land, it was covered with water/ There was no sky, no moon, no sun, no place”⁴⁸

The idea that water is the beginning of everything has been a subject that has attracted the curiosity of primitive people as well as philosophical debates around the world, and the text given here tries to provide an answer. Then it is explained how the earth was created for human beings. This is one of the parts of the text where the conflict of good and evil begins, because man wants to create a place for himself and for this purpose he takes soil from the bottom of the water and brings it for himself, but since man is not God, the created place almost kills him.

“Man said: -O God, I have thought of my share,/ I took some soil in my mouth, thinking I would have a place,/ God shouted to mankind: – Spit!/ Mankind spat and the spittle scattered the earth./ When the earth was flat, it wrinkled and suddenly withered/ It’s like the hills and mountains are full of places that are over.”⁴⁹

In this section, the text answers two questions, “How did the earth come into being? How did the mountains and hills come into being?” As noted in the section on beliefs, the smooth, good and beautiful things were created by God, while the bad, ugly and deformed things were made by Erlik. Here it is clearly seen that man is a being who destroys the smoothness of the world. By furthering this evil, he will turn into Erlik. As a result of this information, the message of the text to those concerned is clear. Going against God’s wishes and doing other things will lead to disruption of order and will cause you to go out of the way and become evil. As a result of the structure of choosing sides given with this information in terms of social shaping, both the sense of curiosity was satisfied and the main structure of the myth, faith, was emphasized. After the creation of the world, it is the turn of human beings and the human race came to life with the greening of the ugly tree without branches and knots that God saw.

“Let nine people be made, from the root of nine branches
May nine clans be derived, from the essence of nine people”⁵⁰

For the Turks, the idea of descending from a tree contributed to the tree being considered sacred, and was effective in primitive man’s connection of himself with another being. When we look at the mythologies of nations, the idea that different

⁴⁷ Sivri, 2022, p. 50.

⁴⁸ Ögel, 2010, p. 451.

⁴⁹ Ögel, 2010, p. 453.

⁵⁰ Ögel, 2010, p. 453.

beings are chosen as ancestors and that the lineage comes from there is still actively valid today. In the later parts of the text, the conflict between good and evil is clearly evident. It is imprinted in the minds that everything good comes from God and everything bad is produced by Erlik. Not only this, but the idea of being on God's side or on Erlik's side, which is dominant in terms of belief, is also clearly revealed. For example, the transformation of the snake into an evil animal is due to the fact that it disobeys God and helps Erlik, while the fertility of the woman is given as a punishment for the same reason.

"Hearing this, God once said to the snake:/ O serpent, from now on be the Devil himself/ Let a human enemy kill you and take your life/ "Be the symbol of evil and let your name remain so."

"From now on, it will always be women who give birth/ The pains and agonies of childbirth will suffocate you."⁵¹

As a result of this answer to the question of why the snake is a feared and evil creature and why the woman gives birth, a certain stereotype has been derived in the minds of the society. In today's Turkish folk beliefs, the snake is still seen as an evil, dirty and feared creature, and there are many narratives about demons disguised as snakes. Likewise, in determining the place of woman in society, her being coded as a being who attracts humanity to sin and who defies God by committing the first sin is one of the inferences from this narrative to the present day. The information given about the universe, the world, the creation of human beings, and the creation of various animals after the creation of human beings is of a kind that will be effective in controlling social memory. After giving Erlik the power to create, the beings created by Erlik are as follows: snake, bear, pig, albis, shulmus, camel, kordoy, yalban.^{52,53} As can be seen, the animals created here are, in general terms, creatures that either have a bad appearance in terms of appearance or have become feared in a way that harms human beings with their actions. At the same time, the fact that different spirits that bring evil and harm to people are also mentioned here emphasizes that Erlik has a share in the evils of not only the earthly but also the transphysical structure. For this reason, people are afraid of these beings and when they encounter them, they engage in a struggle as if they were fighting Erlik. It is clear that the effect of the group that produces and uses information is to control the masses through various manipulations in the form of propaganda and to create friends or enemies.⁵⁴ This section, which describes the creation of the animals that human beings see around them, also explains the causes of the problems that plague individuals and societies, such as poverty, disease and death. By indicating the place to be close to if one moves away from God, people are prevented from objecting in such situations. For this reason, when people encounter such situations, they demand to get rid of it somehow by doing different practices according to the collective consciousness in order to achieve

⁵¹ Ögel, 2010, p. 456-457.

⁵² Ögel, 2010, p. 462.

⁵³ Albis, Shulmus, Kordoy and Yalban are evil spirits and animals created by the devil.

⁵⁴ Oğuzcan, 2023, p. 55.

social relief. From this point of view, the formation of social norms such as various practices, rituals and traditions are used to ensure that the group structure becomes deep-rooted and permanent. In general terms, the formation and transmission of norms is realized through unconscious influence and the power of narratives rather than a conscious structure. This transmission is passed down from generation to generation through oral communication rather than one-to-one experience.⁵⁵

Knowledge is a power in itself in every period. While knowing knowledge is useful for solving problems, in the case of knowledge learned through verbal transmission, power is shared between the transmitter and the knowledge. If the narrator is an entity recognized as an authority by the society, the accuracy of the narrated information is less questioned, while the identity of the narrator is given more importance by the society. This is one of the important points of oral culture. After a while, the transmitted information is questioned as to whether it comes from a strong source or a weak source. In this case, the power of information shifts to the transmitter and it is no longer important what is said but who says it. This accelerates the dissemination of information, makes it easier to accept and harder to reject. As a result, the person who transmits the information can manage and direct the society in the way they want. Although this situation seems to have been broken during the Renaissance period, when philosophy or reason came to the fore in modern societies, it would not be wrong to say that it continues today.

“Living myths”, as Eliade calls them, are exemplary, meaningful and valuable mediums because they are recognized as true stories in their own time.⁵⁶ Since these myths are accepted as real, they rank high as a source of information for primitive people. As a result, the validity of the answers to the questions asked is at a high level, making them easy to accept. Myths, which also have an effective structure in terms of belief, have consequently become a symbol of unconditional acceptance by taking on a structure that is not accepted to be questioned. For primitive humans, accepting what is described here, whether in terms of belief or knowledge, is a convenience because they do not have to think about these things and can continue their daily lives in a more relaxed way and know what to do and what not to do by creating ready-made assumptions. Authorities who want to shape society can use these texts by using social engineering as a guiding force. By evaluating, interpreting or changing the content of the texts according to their own needs, they gain the power to direct societies in the desired direction. It is important to remember that these pieces, which are available in written form today, existed orally at the time they were produced and consumed, and were open to changes. Basically, the main axis of many instruments used to shape society is to minimize disruptions in society, facilitate administration, and eliminate or prevent abnormalities.⁵⁷ As a result, myths have been used as useful instruments in times and groups where the oral culture environment is active in order to create the system deemed necessary.

⁵⁵ Özcan, 1998, p. 49.

⁵⁶ Eliade, 2001, p. 11.

⁵⁷ Ün, 2022, p. 3.

CONCLUSION

The oral culture period of human history is still ongoing. Even though new cultural environments develop, the power of the word maintains its dominance in certain societies and is included in life. When considered on the basis of the analyzed text, it will be seen that myth texts are structures that can be used with different functional codes due to their layered structures. In the control of authorities who produce, transmit and recreate myths through the sacred power of the oral word, narratives can turn into regulatory, controlling, enforcing and restrictive instruments. In the specific case of the Altai creation myth, it can be said that this is the beginning of one of the steps in the cultural development of the Turkish community. While the journey of the universe, the world and human beings is conveyed, the rules about the dynamics around which the order should be shaped are also internally processed as cultural codes.

Social engineering was theoretically established in the 19th century, but it is possible to understand through myths that different instruments have been used in practice to form societies since the primitive period. The main purpose of social engineering is to create a structure that is more easily managed around certain patterns by directing society in the desired way. Today, while these directions are made through mediums such as television and the internet, it is quite natural that in the past this was done through oral culture products. The important thing is to ensure communication, to transfer information and thus to create a uniform public coming out of one place. As a result of the text analysis, it is possible to say that myth texts, which are considered sacred and have enforcement power, are used as a solution to the difficulties experienced in the governance of nomadic communities such as the Turks. Communities, although they create certain systems around their own cultural codes, the power of impact of myths is similar, fulfilling the needs of primitive people and gathering them around certain commonalities. The Altai Turks have been under the influence of many different beliefs in the historical process and have had to live under the pressure of other nations. As a result, it can be observed that there are periodic updates in their oral narratives. The Altai creation myth realizes this by revealing the God-Erlik conflict and the choice it offers to the members of the community. When different variants of the text are examined around this myth, it is also possible to see that different directions are realized by adding and removing the desired structures as a result of changing times and conditions. This creation myth compiled by Radloff also proves how this community was guided by the authorities through the information it provides on the direction of the lifestyle of the Altai Turks in the early periods. As a result, it is possible to see and examine a similar situation in the myths of different nations. For this reason, myths are among the first practical examples of social engineering.

REFERENCES

- Atabek, Nejdet 2003: *Propaganda ve Toplumsal Kontrol* (Propaganda and Social Control). Selcuk Communication: 2(4): 4-12.

- Azimli, Elnur, and Ali Coşun 2023: *Sosyal Kontrol ve Din: Dinin Dindar Bireyler Üzerindeki Kontrol Gücü* (Social Control and Religion: The Control Power of Religion on Religious Individuals). Aydın Journal of Human and Society, 9(1): 1-16.
- Bayat, Fuzuli 2005: *Mitolojiye Giriş* (Introduction to Mythology). Çorum: Karam Publications.
- Büyükokutan Töret, Aslı 2017: *Azerbaycan Türkleri Atasözlerinin Sosyal Kontrol Mekanizmasını Sağlama İşlevi* (The Function of Azerbaijan Turks Proverbs to Provide Social Control Mechanism). Hitit University Journal of Institute of Social Sciences, June, 10(1): 197-208.
- Eliade, Mircea 2001: *Mitlerin Özellikleri* (Properties of Myths). Istanbul: Om Publishing House.
- Göka, Erol 2006: *Türk Grup Davranışı* (Turkish Group Behavior). Ankara: Aşına Books.
- Kağıtçıbaşı, Çiğdem, and Zeynep Cemalcılar 2014: *Dünden Bugüne İnsan ve İnsanlar Sosyal Psikolojiye Giriş* (Human and People from Yesterday to Today Introduction to Social Psychology). Istanbul: Evrim Publishing House.
- Kefeli, Emel 2013: *Bir Toplum Mühendisi Olarak Ahmet Mithat Efendi* (Ahmet Mithat Efendi as a Social Engineer). New Turkish Literature Journal, 7: 27-35.
- Krech, David, and S. Richard Crutchfield 1980: *Sosyal Psikoloji* (Social Psychology). Istanbul: Ötügen Publishing.
- Malinowski, Bronislaw 1998: *İlkel Toplum* (Primitive Society). Ankara: Öteki Publishing.
- Oğuzcan, Anıl Uğur 2023: *Toplum Mühendisliği Yaklaşımından Halkla İlişkilerin Dünü, Bugünü ve Yarını Üzerine Bir Araştırma* (A Research on the Past, Present and Future of Public Relations from a Social Engineering Approach). Istanbul: Marmara University, Social Sciences University, Department of Public Relations, Division of Public Relations, Unpublished Doctoral Thesis.
- Ögel, Bahaeddin 2010: *Türk Mitolojisi 1* (Turkish Mythology 1). Ankara: Atatürk Culture Language and History High School Turkish Historical Society Publications.
- Özcan, Mehmet Tefik 1998: *İlkel Toplumlarda Toplumsal Kontrol* (Social Control in Primitive Societies). Istanbul: Özne Publications.
- Özdemir, Nur 2023: *Bir Sosyal Kontrol Aracı Olarak Din ve Yeni Medya* (Religion and New Media as a Tool of Social Control). Çukurova University Journal of Institute of Social Sciences 32(3): 42-50.
- Park, Robert Ezda, and Ernest W. Burgess 2017: *Asimilasyon ve Sosyala Kontrol Sosyoloji Bilimine Giriş II* (Assimilation and Social Control Introduction to Sociology II). Istanbul: Pinhan Publishing.
- Sivri, Medine 2022: *Karşılaştırmalı Edebiyat Açısından Mit, Mitokiritik ve Sembolik İmgelem* (Myth, Mythocriticism and Symbolic Imagery in Terms of Comparative Literature). Belgü Ardahan University Journal of the Faculty of Human Sciences and Literature, 7: 48-58.
- Ün, Lütfullah 2022: *Yönetim Mekanizması Olarak Sosyal Kontrol Üzerine Bir Değerlendirme* (An Evaluation on Social Control as a Management Mechanism). Academic Review, 19(79): 1-14.