

## SYNERGETIC ANALYSIS OF AZERBAIJANI TURK FUNERAL RITUALS

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### Abstract

Examining Azerbaijani Turk rituals through the lens of synergetic—a theory developed by Hermann Haken that explores how complex systems self-organize and maintain order through the interaction of many elements—is known as a synergetic analysis. It is simpler to comprehend how customs evolve, adapt, and preserve social harmony in shifting contexts when it comes to culture and folklore. This paper examines Azerbaijani Turk funeral rituals through the theoretical framework of synergetic, a scientific paradigm that explains how complex systems achieve order through interaction and self-organization. Death, as a social and emotional disruption, generates instability within the community; however, through ritual practices, this instability transforms into collective balance and harmony. The study identifies the main order parameters—faith, collective solidarity, and purification—and shows how these regulate the system of mourning. Azerbaijani funeral rituals are interpreted as self-organizing cultural structures that restore order, reinforce identity, and maintain social and spiritual equilibrium.

### 1. Introduction

One of the deepest expressions of the Azerbaijani Turks' collective identity, worldview, and continuity is found in their traditional ceremonies. These rituals, which have their roots in ancient Turkic cosmology and have been enhanced by Islamic and local influences,

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represent a dynamic system of customs that link the individual to the community and the community to the natural and spiritual order. Every ritual, from Novruz festivities that represent cosmic renewal to wedding and bereavement rites that symbolize societal unity, has intricate levels of significance and group interaction. It is crucial to treat them as dynamic systems of self-organization rather than just as anthropological objects in order to completely comprehend their enduring life. Synergetic offers this perspective.

The multidisciplinary study of how order and structure arise naturally from the interplay of numerous components inside complex systems is known as synergetic, a term coined by physicist Hermann Haken in 1983. The application of synergetic concepts to cultural, social, and linguistic phenomena has grown, despite its origins in the natural sciences. From this perspective, rituals can be understood as self-organizing cultural systems that result from members of a society acting together. A ritual's collective performance creates stability, meaning, and social cohesiveness—what Haken refers to as "order parameters"—that control members' behavior and mold the culture as a whole.

Burial customs in Azerbaijan have a very long history, as may be seen by looking back. *Eight different kinds of grave monuments have been discovered in our nation through archaeological excavations. Simple clay, well, vat, wooden box, stone box, catacomb, mud brick, and pitcher graves were among these grave kinds [].*

This synergistic framework explains how Azerbaijani Turk rites have endured over centuries of political, religious, and technical change. Ilya Prigogine's (1980) theory of dissipative structures states that systems exchange energy and information with their surroundings to keep themselves organized. In a similar vein, Azerbaijani rituals constantly engage with Persian, Islamic, and international influences while rearranging themselves internally to preserve balance. These rites' flexibility illustrates the nonlinear dynamics of cultural evolution, in which order is renewed rather than destroyed by change.

We may thus examine Azerbaijani Turk rituals as dynamic cultural systems where tradition and innovation coexist in harmony by using the concepts of synergetic. The development of ritual order from the variety of individual acts serves as an example of how shared symbolic understanding and group participation lead to societal harmony. In addition to expanding our understanding of Azerbaijani cultural resilience, this viewpoint places these rituals in the context of a larger theoretical conversation on complexity, self-organization, and cultural evolution. The synergetic method thus provides a link between the rich symbolic life of Azerbaijani heritage and scientific models of dynamic systems, demonstrating how culture itself is a dynamic, self-regulating organism.

In order to investigate how customs, myths, and rituals function as living systems—adapting, restructuring, and maintaining balance in the face of change—this article utilized synergetic analysis of Azerbaijani Turk culture. Synergetic analysis aids scholars in comprehending the following aspects of Azerbaijani Turk rituals:

*a. Order through interaction*

Rituals unite different participants—elders, youth, musicians, shamans, and community members—into a single dynamic structure. For example: Novruz celebrations combine agricultural, cosmic, and social elements (fire, water, greenery, and family gatherings), symbolizing renewal and balance between humans and nature. The system's order parameter here is balance and renewal.

### *b. Fluctuations and Adaptation*

Cultural rituals evolve when external influences (religion, modernization, and politics) introduce fluctuations. Example: Pre-Islamic elements (fire worship, nature cults) merged with Islamic prayers and Quran recitations in wedding or mourning rituals. These adaptations show the self-regulating capacity of Azerbaijani culture.

### *c. Energy and Feedback Mechanisms*

Rituals often involve rhythmic and energetic processes — dance, music, fire, collective chants — which generate emotional energy and social cohesion. Yalli dance, Ashiq performances, and Xıdır Nəbi celebrations use rhythm as feedback that reinforces communal unity.

## **2. Research Aims**

Using the theoretical framework of synergetic—a scientific paradigm that explains how order and structure arise from dynamic and nonlinear interactions inside complex systems—this study attempts to investigate Azerbaijani Turk rites. Using this multidisciplinary approach, the study aims to comprehend how traditional Azerbaijani rituals maintain internal harmony, adjust to outside influences, and constantly reorganize themselves in response to changes in culture, society, and technology.

## **3. Research Question**

1. How does collective participation in ritual processes contribute to cultural stability and the renewal of communal identity?
2. How does the interaction between tradition and innovation in Azerbaijani rituals reflect broader laws of dynamic cultural evolution?

## **4. Methodology**

Based on ethnographic, folkloric, and semiotic data about Azerbaijani Turk burial rituals, the study employs a qualitative analytical methodology. The analysis applies the synergistic principles of order construction, fluctuation, and feedback to the interpretation of observable ritual steps, including death announcement, body preparation, burial, grief, and commemoration. Social and symbolic roles are analyzed as interdependent components of a dynamic system.

## **5. Death as a Fluctuation: From Chaos to Order**

Humans have convened to ritualize the transition from life to death since the beginning of time. At this time, rituals were carried out, and the burial was done in accordance with the

deceased's personality. *“Every culture in the world has a custom of mourning. These traditions have endured across religions, eras, and locations for thousands of years. They have strong roots and traditions. These traditions demonstrate a profound regard for the departed. Nonetheless, these rituals preserve the historical and religious components of contemporary funeral customs”*[Murshudova, p. 170].

The community system becomes disorganized at the moment of death. Crying, wailing (ağl), and group grieving are examples of emotional responses that indicate a situation of enhanced entropy. This is known as the transition phase in synergetic, during which the previous equilibrium is disrupted. This turmoil starts to be organized by the funeral ritual. The community comes together, and customs like the funeral prayer (cənazə namazı), body washing (qüsl), and shrouding (kəfən) start the shift toward a new kind of order. The system is stabilized by the presence of family, neighbors, and religious leaders, which turns mourning into a shared experience. *“Ritual symbols such as the earth, water, fire, and air accompany the well-known symbols of death, such as coffin, flowers, and a hearse”* [William, p.3].

Funerals are seen by Azerbaijan Turk as essential to ensuring the deceased's "safe passage" to the afterlife or as a means of appeasing the deceased. They may also serve as a way for bereaved survivors and the departed to atone for their words and deeds. Van Gennep's (1960) early work created a three-part structure for understanding funeral rituals: rituals of separation (preliminal), transition (liminal), and incorporation (postliminal).

## **6. Order Parameters in Funeral Rituals**

The process of reorganization in Azerbaijani funeral culture is guided by several order parameters that determine the direction of collective behavior:

1. Faith (İman): The Islamic belief in the afterlife and divine will provides the main stabilizing principle. It gives meaning to death and transforms despair into acceptance.
2. Collective Solidarity: The participation of the entire community—helping the bereaved, preparing meals (ehsan), offering condolences—creates coherence and emotional balance.
3. Purification: Ritual washing of the body and the spiritual purification of the mourners symbolize the removal of chaos and renewal of life's continuity. Those who had come into contact with a dead body were considered "spiritually" impure. Those who did not perform a ghusl within three hours of the deceased were forbidden to touch pots and dishes containing offerings, as well as other people.

## **7. Stages of Synergetic Self-Organization**

At the initial stage, the social system experiences emotional turbulence. Spontaneous expressions of grief release inner tension and act as a form of catharsis. This stage corresponds to the chaotic or fluctuating state in synergetic.

As people gather to mourn, emotional states begin to align. The rhythm of collective prayers, Qur'an recitations, and lamentations synchronize the participants' emotions, creating a

coherent system. This collective resonance produces coherence, one of the essential synergetic phenomena.

A pattern of order is imposed upon the emotional and spiritual sphere by symbolic acts like lowering the body into the ground, giving food, lighting candles, and praying. The system shifts from anarchy to order, from sorrow to sacred significance.

The system's long-term stability is ensured by yearly memorials (*il mərəsimi*) and commemorative ceremonies on the third, seventh, and fortyth days. These repeated actions strengthen recollections, preserve ties to ancestors, and incorporate loss into the shared story.

Funeral rituals preserve a delicate dynamic equilibrium: grief (chaos) and faith (order) coexist. The balance between these two poles ensures psychological healing and cultural resilience. The Azerbaijani funeral system thus exemplifies what synergetics calls the “edge of chaos”—a condition where creativity and renewal emerge from instability.

### **Conclusion**

Azerbaijani Turk rituals can be interpreted as cultural models of order formation that occur through communal involvement and symbolic communication, drawing on Hermann Haken's idea of synergetics—the study of how order emerges from chaos by cooperative contact.

Nonlinear dynamics are demonstrated by rituals like funeral ceremony, where a number of discrete activities come together to form a cohesive whole. Repetition, adaptability, and renewal are feedback loops that perpetuate these behaviors. Systems that are far from equilibrium can remain stable by sharing energy and information with their surroundings, as Ilya Prigogine highlighted in his theory of dissipative structures. This idea is demonstrated by Azerbaijani Turk ceremonies, which consistently incorporate new historical, religious, and social elements while maintaining their fundamental uniqueness and harmony.

The ritual space becomes a site of cultural division where traditional beliefs collide with modern realities when viewed through a synergetic perspective. For instance, new forms of ritual expression have been brought about by urbanization, globalization, and digital transformation, but the core structure—unity, harmony, and renewal—remains. According to Haken, the community's collective consciousness serves as the "order parameter," controlling individual actions and bringing them into harmony and common purpose.

The synergistic study of Azerbaijani Turk burial customs shows that death serves as a trigger for cultural self-organization rather than as a final occurrence. The community restores social and spiritual order through organized interaction, group involvement, and symbolic expression. Purification, solidarity, and faith serve as order parameters that steer the system toward equilibrium. Cohesion and self-control are facilitated by the circulation of emotional energy through ritualistic actions.

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