

REPRESENTING AND PERFORMING LAZ IDENTITY

“THIS IS NOT A REBEL SONG!”

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2011

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Thesis submitted to the

Institute for Graduate Studies in Social Sciences

in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

in

Sociology

by

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2011

Thesis Abstract

Nilüfer Taşkın, “Representing and Performing Laz identity

‘This is not a rebel song!’”

This study examines the process by which second generation Laz migrants have re-appropriated Laz identity through music and dance performances held in the major metropolitan cities of twenty first century Turkey.

The relevant cultural performances are interpreted as a response to repercussions of Turkey’s ‘modernization project’ and its related cultural policies. Conceptualizing the performances, particularly through language, music and dance, this thesis tries to understand how the Laz experience respond to this ‘modernization’.

Another significant concern of this study is to analyze how Lazness is defined and constructed within mainstream discourses. As a part of this, the crucial role of the Laz middle class position is discussed. In addition, the recent wave of ‘multiculturalist discourse’ provides a convenient conceptual framework for positioning the Laz as the “good citizens” of contemporary Turkey. Finally, the so-called ‘oppositional stance’ of both the performances and the constructed Laz identity are criticized with consideration given to their marketability and political moderation.

Tez Özeti

Nilüfer Taşkın, “Laz Kimliğinin Temsili ve Performansı

‘Bu bir isyan şarkısı değil!’”

Bu çalışma, ikinci kuşak Laz göçmenlerin özellikle 2000’lerde, büyük kentlerde ortaya çıkan müzik ve dans performansları üzerinden Laz kimliği ile nasıl ilişkilendiğini sorgulamaktadır.

Bu kültürel performanslar, Türkiye’deki ‘modernleşme projesi’ doğrultusunda ortaya çıkan kültür politikalarına bir tepki olarak yorumlanmaktadır. Bu tez, dil, müzik ve dans temaları üzerinden bu kültür performanslarını kavramsallaştırmak yoluyla Lazların modernleşme deneyimlerini anlama çabasıdır.

Bu çalışmanın diğer bir önemli kaygısı da, Lazlığın nasıl egemen söylemler içinden tanımlandığı ve kurulduğunu analiz etmektir. Bu bağlamda, bir taraftan Lazlar’ın orta sınıf pozisyonlarının hayati rol oynadığı tartışılmıştır. Öte yandan, yakın dönemde yükselen ‘çokkültürlülük söylemi’nin kendisi Lazlar’ı Türkiye’nin ‘makbul vatandaşlar’ pozisyonuna yerleştirmek için ideal kavramsal çerçeveyi sunmaktadır.

Sonuç olarak bu tezde, bu performansların ve dolayısıyla kurulan Laz kimliğinin, pazar değeri ve politik ılımlılıkları göz önünde bulundurulduğunda iddia edildiğinin aksine ‘muhalif’ olma durumları eleştirilmektedir.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Perhaps *no* writing can be credited to a single author, despite the appearance of a singular name below the title. This is particularly true of a masters thesis—a voyage into the world of scholarship. Thus, there are many people, from academic advisors to family and friends, to whom I am grateful for their assistance in finalizing my masters thesis.

First of all, I would like to thank my supervisor Assoc. Prof. Meltem Ahıska for her sincere support and encouragement particularly through struggles in the writing process. I am deeply grateful for her meticulous guidance and critique. Completing the writing process would not have been possible without her constant belief in me. I would also like to thank Prof. Dr. Nükhet Sirman for her valuable contributions in developing the analytical framework of my study. Moreover, the questions that emerged during our readings together shaped a large portion of my research. To Prof. Dr. Arzu Öztürkmen, who kindly agreed to participate in my jury and shared insight from her wealth of field experiences at the very beginning of my research, I also express my utmost gratitude.

In addition, I am especially grateful to Assoc. Prof. Yüksel Taşkın. Besides his critique and support of this particular project, he has been influential in my choice to study sociology from the start. (I would, otherwise, probably have been a terrible accountant.) I would also like to thank Ayşenur Kolivar and Ender Abadoğlu who always encouraged me generously not only by opening their library and archive but also motivated me to work in this field. Our long conversations about ‘identity’, furthermore, assisted me in discovering my main arguments.

I am indebted to Kim Bowen for her time and hard work. She was a lifesaver as I revised the text, and I hope to work together with this young ethnomusicologist again!

I am deeply grateful to all of my interviewees for the time they kindly reserved to help me with this project. I must particularly mention Birol Topaloğlu here, for sharing his sincere opinions and experiences. I am also thankful to Songül for her generous offering of access to interviews conducted for the BGST archive.

I would like to present my warm and sincere thanks to the members of *Dalepe Nena*, Refika, Ömür and Musti K; who have been there for me with their friendship, help and understanding.

My deep gratitude goes to my dearest family Sevim, Mehmet, Elif, Yasemin, Halil Can—you have stayed beside me and supported me during my most stressful moments.

Last, but not least, thanks to Besri, for being my most thorough critic, support and invaluable advice. I am indebted to his inspirational sociological imagination for the development of some of my arguments.

To my dearest Sevilay Abula;
for every single moment
you've spent with me since I was born...

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

This research aims to examine how the second generation of Laz migrants came to associate themselves with Laz identity through particular cultural performances that have been taking place in the major metropolitan cities of Turkey in the 2000s. My main concern is to find out and analyze how Lazness is defined and constructed within the mainstream discourses expressed through music and dance performances. I consider this question significant because Laz identity has increasingly turned into a highly contested domain within which some attempt to negotiate their identity with Turkish nationalism, and others alternatively try to open a space for Laz identity within the discourse and practices of the recent wave of multiculturalism.

I find it particularly important to conduct research on this subject because there are no academic studies that approach Laz ethnic/cultural identity from a full-fledged sociological perspective in Turkey despite the existence of several anthropological studies carried out by researchers outside of Turkey.¹ In general, this negligence can be attributed to the overall perception of the Laz identity even though the “Laz” are frequently paid lip-service when listing the ethnic minorities in Turkey², Laz identity has not yet been made a subject of comprehensive study and debate either in academy or in politics. As I will attempt to explore in this study, I believe this situation is strongly related to the historical context of Laz identity.

¹ Ildiko Beller Hann, 1999; Meeker, 1971; Ascherson, 2001; Chris M. Hann, 1990

² One can easily see the frequent use of the rhyme “*Türkü Kürdü Ermenisi Lazı Çerkezi...*”.

Besides my personal experience in a middle-class Laz family surrounded by a Laz community in Istanbul, my particular interest in this subject has been generated largely by cultural events and organizations in which I found myself involved since the Laz language course I accidentally attended at *Özgür Üniversite* in 2000.³ Upon attending this course I became a member of a female band, *Dalepe Nena*, singing in Laz and other Black Sea languages. These events were mainly in the field of music and dance around which, I strongly believe, the claims of cultural identity are re-shaped and re-constructed.

In addition to the performances in which I participated, I also worked for the *Gola* organization from 2006 to 2009 to produce the *Yeşil Yayla Kültür, Sanat ve Çevre Festivali*. This festival takes place in diverse sites around the Eastern Black Sea and has been subjected to hot political debates about ethnic identity in the region.⁴ Apart from these experiences in the cultural realm, for one and a half years, I have been working in the catering business running a Black Sea cuisine restaurant in Istanbul, which has helped me understand the performance of cultural identity through the concept of ‘consumption’. These experiences as a participant observer have formed a comparative advantage for me in realizing my proposed research goals.

³ *Özgür Üniversite* is an independent foundation which provides alternative courses as well as workshops and seminars to university curriculum particularly in social sciences.

⁴ One of the USA originated sponsor of the festival triggered the conspiracy theories claiming the organizers having an intention to provoke the Laz nationalism in the region while the festival’s events were designed to flourish the Laz culture through revitalizing the public memory. Furthermore, the conspiracy theories about *Gola* and the organizers diversified according to the music groups took place such as; *Kardeş Türküler* associated with the Kurdish nationalism while Helesa (singing in Hemşin language) provoked the Armenian identity conflict in the region. Those facts circulated widely in the region once it took place in the national media.

I care about the notion of ‘experience’ especially because it enables me to understand how subjectivities are created in a social and historical context. Joan W. Scott argues that, “experience is at once always already an interpretation and is in need of interpretation. What counts as experience is neither self-evident nor straightforward; it is always contested, always therefore political”.⁵ Studying one's own community always implies the problem of keeping enough distance with the research subject as well as the risk of falling into subjectivity and essentialism. Based on the above concerns related to experience, it was also important for me to avoid essentialism, so I focused on the concepts of ‘practice’ and ‘discourse’ as Abu-Lughod suggests.⁶ Given that, the performances provided me with the most appropriate research field.

James Clifford reminds us that we can better understand cultural identity not by studying the artifacts of museums or libraries, but through observing emergent performances. Moreover, “increasingly, language, narrative and performance have become spaces in which diasporic identities are being explored as ways of producing locality”.⁷ As my primary goal in this thesis is to explore the changing context of the ‘Laz identity’ in the last decade, it was crucial to investigate the cultural performances of the Laz that have emerged in this period in the urban context to such an extent that

⁵ Joan W. Scott, “Experience” in *Feminists Theorize the Political*, (Eds.) Judith Butler and Joan W. Scott, London: Routledge, 1992, p.37 Cited in Melissa Bilal, “*The Lost Lullaby and Other Stories About Being an Armenian in Turkey*”, Unpublished MA Thesis, Sociology Department, Boğaziçi University, 2004, p. 24

⁶Lila Abu-Lughod, “Writing Against Culture” in *Recapturing Anthropology*, Richard Fox (Ed.) Santa Fe: School of American Research, 1991, p. 472

⁷ A. Appadurai, ' *Sovereignty Without Territoriality: Notes for a Postcolonial Geography, The Geography of Identity* ', Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996 cited in Leyla Neyzi, “Embodied Elders: Space and Subjectivity in the Music of Metin-Kemal Kahraman” *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 38, No. 1, 2002, p. 90

Lazness has been identified with music and dance nowadays. Therefore, my main concern is to understand the contextual framework of those performances, that transform an ‘invisible’ identity to an excessively ‘visible’ one. Thus, by using the performance theory, I believe that one can look into fields otherwise closed off to critical inquiry. Moreover, performance theory enabled me to conceptualize the ‘identity’ contextually.

Performance theory has been popular in the recent studies in sociology particularly related to the identity issue. That is probably because performances are significant as they have the potential to embody, reflect and shape the ‘identity’. The concept of identity deployed here is therefore not an essentialist, but a strategic and positional one. Focusing on the very historical process by which it is produced is important.

That is to say, directly contrary to what appears to be its settled semantic career, this concept of identity does *not* signal that stable core of the self, unfolding from beginning to end through all the vicissitudes of history without change, the bit of the self which remains always-already ‘the same’, identical to itself across time.⁸ In order to historicize the constitution of Laz identity, it was also crucial to investigate the Turkish nation-building process. While doing that, I focused on how the Laz responded to and internalized the assimilation policies that were employed for constructing the ‘nation’. At this point, the concept of ‘personalization of history’⁹ allowed me to observe the

⁸ Stuart Hall, “Who Needs ‘Identity’?” in *Questions of Cultural Identity*, edited by Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay, Sage Publications, London, 1998, p. 3

⁹ Meltem Ahıska, *Radyonun Sihirli Kapısı: Garbiyatçılık ve Politik Öznellik*, Metis Yayınları, İstanbul, 2005

effects of the Turkish experience of modernism on the individuals, particularly the ones from Laz origin.

In this respect, the role of tea farming which was introduced and subsidized by the state from the 1950s onwards has been crucial in enabling the ‘domestication’ of the state in the Laz region. The middle-class position of the Laz which was achieved with tea farming was considerably influential in the formation of the contemporary Laz identity concurrent with earlier historical positions of the Laz.

Once we accept that identities are constructed within and, not outside, discourse, we need to understand them as produced in specific historical and institutional sites within specific discursive formations and practices, by specific enunciative strategies.¹⁰ Hence my interest about the discourses of the so-called ‘Laz Cultural Movement’, which emerged in the 1990s as an attempt to challenge the conventional Laz stereotype that was shaped and reflected within the hegemonic discourse. When I reviewed the productions of these contemporary Laz intellectuals, I found out that the primary concern has been to eradicate the pejorative connotations of Laz identity and revitalize ‘Laz culture’, which was said to be ‘dissolved’ dramatically due to the assimilation policies of the nation state. However, the intellectuals’ vision was rather different from the people’s expectations and perceptions about Lazness. This is why their efforts were rather marginalized and failed to turn into a mass movement.

In the 2000s, the monolithic structure of the ‘nation’ has considerably lost its legitimacy due to the concurrent facts that have made “the national” identity the target of

¹⁰ Stuart Hall, “Who Needs ‘Identity?’” in *Questions of Cultural Identity*, edited by Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay, Sage Publications, London, 1998, p. 4

increasing challenges and questioning, such as globalism, Kurdish Political Movement, etc. in Turkey. Thus, the new millennium brought about celebrations of multicultural differences in a relative manner. Music turned to be one of the significant realms of the articulation of ‘multiculturalist’ discourses, which, for example, employed the metaphor of ‘mosaic’ to describe the togetherness of different ‘cultures’ in this period. Within this historical context, Kazım Koyuncu’s music and his personality became a phenomenon not only for the Laz but also for the Black Sea Diaspora. Concurrent with many facts, I interpret this phenomenon as a response of the people to the nation state’s cultural policies which was constituted on the hierarchical dichotomy of ‘modern’ vs. ‘tradition’.

Despite some other musicians and bands performing Laz music, I suggest that Koyuncu played an important role in changing the perceptions of Lazness in Turkey. I argue that not only Kazım Koyuncu but also his followers who created ‘Black Sea Rock’ as a musical genre transformed the ‘invisible, pejorative, primitive’ connotations of Laz identity to a ‘desired’ one. That actually meant the realization of one of the goals of the Laz intellectuals: making the Laz visible in the public sphere.

A so-called ‘cultural identity’ necessarily corresponds to a ‘political identity’. However, each of these identities is at best a cultural construct, a political or ideological construct, that is, ultimately, a historical construct.¹¹ Apparently, the ‘Laz identity’ that has emerged as a construct of the market, the multiculturalism discourse and the cultural expectations of the Laz seems to have reconciled those two groups -the intellectuals and the people- in defining a sort of ‘acceptable locality’. In other words Laz identity was re-

¹¹ Jean-François Bayart, *The Illusion of Cultural Identity*, University of Chicago Press (Co-published with C. Hurst & Co.), 2005, p. ix

shaped in way that was not demanding anything apart from performing music and dance, in contrast for example with the Kurds or the Armenians, that is, the ‘dangerous’ identities.

Firth says that “what music (pop) can do is put into play a sense of identity that may or may not fit the way we are placed by other social facts.”¹² Thus, I will treat the potential of these performances for constructing an ‘identity’ in two respects: whether they are opening up any realm of subjectivity for the Laz or they are constructing new stereotypes and consequently closing any possibility for the expression of ‘experiences’ of the Laz themselves.

One of the significant outcomes of my research has been to find the intercourse of the Laz identity with the Kurdish identity. Either in the productions of the Laz intellectuals or the contemporary musical performances, it is possible to observe a direct or indirect reference to the Kurdish identity. The Kurdish problem due to its political centrality today occupies a very significant place in the discussion of identities in Turkey. This has also been valid for my research since comparing the position of Kurds with the Laz was inevitable as the two ethnic groups have common characteristics in terms of bilingualism, rural origin, and indigenesness in Anatolia.

With this research project, I hope to contribute to the critique of the nation state’s cultural policies, which were employed from the beginning of the Turkish Republic to determine the people’s cultural identity by constituting a hierarchical scaling between the ‘local’ and ‘national’ through the concept of ‘modernity’. The contemporary cultural

¹² S. Frith: ‘Towards an Aesthetic of Popular Music’, *Music and Society: the Politics of Composition, Performance, and Reception*, ed. R. Leppert and S. McClary, Cambridge, 1987, p. 149

policies, on the other hand, while pretending that they ‘recognize’ the cultural differences through ‘multiculturalist’ discourses, tend to conceal the oppressive policies that still continue, and construct new hierarchies in the society.

During my studies, I benefited from several methodologies. First of all, the main arguments were shaped in the light of my own experiences and the notes that I have taken through years. Moreover, I attended as many cultural performances as I could, and benefitted from the methods of oral history and short interviews. In addition to these, discourse analysis has been the primary methodological tool that has enabled me to problematize and analyze the data I have collected from diverse sources such as books, magazines, and interviews.

CHAPTER II:
THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE CONTEMPORARY LAZ
IDENTITY

In this chapter, I will attempt to expose the economic and social conditions that have shaped the contemporary Laz identity. In this context, I will discuss the role of tea farming in transforming the Laz from the lower class peasants into middle class urban dwellers. I will also analyze the impact of the Republican cultural policies in externalizing the local traditional values in line with the modernization project which positioned the Laz within the hegemonic discourse as ‘loyal citizens’ to the state.

A Brief History of the Term ‘Laz’

The words such as *Laz*, *Lazi* or *Lazepe* in Laz language, *Lazlar* in Turkish, *Lazi* or *Č’ani* in Georgian signify an ethnic group native to the Black Sea coastal regions of Turkey and Georgia. Even though there are discussions about the historical roots and the specific location, the Laz are said to be one of the chief tribes of the ancient civilization of Colchis¹³. Another historical information that I would like to emphasize is the conventional mission attributed to the Laz as guardians of the Caucasian border both during the Byzantium or the Ottoman period.¹⁴ The Laz were initially early adopters of Christianity during the Byzantium era in the 4th century, and subsequently they

¹³ Ali İhsan Aksamaz, 1997, p. 19; İldiko Beller Hann, 1999, p.19; Meeker, 1971, p.336; Ascherson, 2001, p. 253

¹⁴ Michael Meeker, 1971, p.325; İsmail Avcı, 1999, p.29

converted to Sunni Islam of the Hanefi sect during the Ottoman rule of the Caucasus in the 16th century.¹⁵

During Byzantine times, with the gradual assimilation of the Pontic tribes into the Byzantine Empire, the word Colchis gave way to the term Laz which was then extended to designate the Pontic peoples extending from Trabzon to Batum as a whole, analogous to the same term that is commonly used in contemporary Turkey.¹⁶

The people in Turkey use the name "Laz" in a general way to refer to all inhabitants of Turkey's Black Sea provinces to the east of Samsun, and the word is often associated with certain social stereotypes. Trabzon Chronicles in 1906 refers to this mix-up in the following way :

Even though all the dwellers of this region are called Laz, no doubt it derives from ignorance. Because Laz have distinguishing features with their language, customs and way of life.¹⁷

Similarly, the Laz themselves are increasingly keen on differentiating themselves from other inhabitants of these regions. The non-Laz community commonly refer to the Laz community as “*Mohti/ Komohti-Laz*”¹⁸, meaning “real Laz” to emphasize their bilingual characteristic. There seems to be no doubt that this has been a stable linguistic frontier for many generations. The Laz speak the Laz language which is related to

¹⁵ Ali İhsan Aksamaz, 1997, p.39, Recai Özgün, 1996, p.85

¹⁶ Michael E. Meeker 1971, p. 337 ; Chris M. Hann, 1990, p. 5

¹⁷ Ismail Avcı, “*Lazlarda Sosyokültürel Değişim*”, Unpublished MA Thesis, International Relations Department, İstanbul University, 2002, p.6

¹⁸ *Mohti/Komohti* means ‘come’ in Laz language.

Mingrelian, Georgian and Svan (South Caucasian languages).¹⁹ Yet the Laz language is not a written one: Turkish and Georgian serve as the literary languages for the Laz in Turkey and Georgia, respectively. Therefore, the Laz are typically bilingual.

Today most Laz speakers live in the Northeast of Turkey, formerly known as Lazistan (modern Rize and Artvin provinces) in a narrow strip of land along the shore of the Black Sea. They form the majority in Pazar (Atina), Ardeşen (Art'aşeni) and Fındıklı (Vitze) districts of Rize, and in Arhavi (Ark'abi) and Hopa (Xopa) districts of Artvin. They live as minorities in the neighbouring Çamlıhemşin (Vijadibi) and Borçka districts. There are also communities in northwestern Anatolia (Karamürsel in Kocaeli, Akçakoca in Düzce, Sakarya, Zonguldak, Bartın), where many immigrants have settled since the Turko-Russian War (1877-1878), and now there are also Laz people in Istanbul, Ankara and other big cities of Turkey and in European countries.

In all these regions, the Laz people live together with Hemşin people --who either speak an ancient Armenian dialect or its Turkish accent-- as well as with Georgians, Turks and, relatively more distantly, with the Pontic Greeks in the west. That means there are common cultural characteristics shared with those ethnic groups particularly in music, dance, language and cuisine.

Most of the people of the Laz region would presumably acknowledge a collective identity of Laz like in the recent past, although those west of Pazar would probably have preferred local destinations such as *Rizeli*, *Çayelili*. We can also say that Laz people are very likely to refer to their hometowns instead of a city when someone

¹⁹ Gordon, Raymond G., Jr. (ed.) *Ethnologue: Languages of the World*, Fifteenth edition. Dallas, Tex.: SIL International, 2005 Online version: <http://www.ethnologue.com/>

asks about their origin. This is just because the Laz region in Eastern Black Sea is divided into the two cities of Rize and Artvin. However, just to differentiate their identity from the non-Laz community, they also refer to the name of their town such as *Pazarlı, Fındıklı, Arhavili* as these are commonly known as Laz districts.

Tea Production and the Domestication of the State in the Laz Region

In my research project, as I concentrated on the construction of Laz identity mainly in Istanbul, I found that the tea industry is an important contextual aspect shaping the contemporary identities of the Laz migrants. Hence, I will start with the recent economic history of the Laz region in the Eastern Black Sea. As I will elaborate upon later in this text, I claim that today the Laz identity that came into prominence is highly influenced by its historical relations with the state. In order to explain this relation, I find it extremely important to dwell on the history of tea farming which engendered the ‘domestication’ of the state in the Laz region. I use the term ‘domestication’ to denote the recognition, being recognized and internalizing of the nation state as Hann conceptualized in his research from 1983 to 1988 in a Laz village Sümer in Fındıklı, Rize.²⁰

The traditional economy in the region was based on agriculture and the production of hazelnuts, maize, rice, and hemp until the 1950s, when the introduction of tea cultures began. They have grown in importance since then. Another aspect of this

²⁰ Chris M. Hann, *Tea and the Domestication of the Turkish State*, The Eothen Press, Cambridgeshire, England, 1990, p 66

former economy is the export of labor. Older male members of the family used to go abroad to metropolises, particularly in Soviet Russia, to work in the service industry.²¹ The mobility of the Laz via sea routes, particularly to flourishing Russian ports on the Black Sea,²² gave them trading opportunities that were not available to the peasants of other parts of Anatolia.²³ Early Laz migrants going to the metropolises of Turkey generally worked in the service industry like their *Hemşinli* neighbours.

Tea farming was introduced in the region in the 1930s and just after the passing of the tea law in 1940, it rapidly became the main product of the region from the eastern coast of Artvin to the few towns of western Trabzon. The introduction of the tea industry eliminated the hitherto closed-economy, the self-rearing way of life. Tea farming's pivotal role has been the key factor in the Laz community's change from a relatively autonomous position to becoming a subsidiary to the state. This is because tea farming was primarily encouraged and subsidized by the state itself—particularly during the Democrat Party's term in the 1950s. Even though there have been other entrepreneurs since 1986, the state-owned Çaykur, based in Rize, is still the biggest and the most stable tea company in the country.

Like other districts near Trabzon, the valleys of the Rize region were not subject to effective central power, rather they remained, until the last hundred years or so, under

²¹ Uğur Biryol, *Hemşin Pastası*, İletişim Yayınevi, İstanbul, 2007

²² Esat Sarı, "Çay Üreticileri Gözden Çıkarıldı mı?", *Mjora Lazepeşi Nena*, Sayı 2, Çivi Yazıları Yayınevi, İstanbul, 2000, p.10

²³ Chris M. Hann, *Tea and the Domestication of the Turkish State*, The Eothen Press, Cambridgeshire, England, 1990, p. 7

the influence of their own notables, the ‘great family aghas.’²⁴ Certainly this region had long maintained close contacts with the centre, e.g., through its traditions of military and naval service. Laz loyalty to the Ottoman state was nourished throughout the long period when their territory was threatened by Russian expansion into the Caucasus, and the initial stimulus of the regional economy in the 1920s may well have been in part motivated by the desire to ensure that the loyalty of a vulnerable frontier region would be smoothly transferred to the new republican power,²⁵ as it had been the case in the past.

Benefiting from state subsidization of tea farming, community living in the Laz region in the Eastern Black Sea became almost dependent on the state with a navel cord. Before 1950, Rize was doubly remote, being on the periphery of an already peripheral state. Following the expulsion of the Pontic Greeks, previously very influential in Black Sea commercial life, the prospects for the emergence here of a modern bourgeois society receded still further.²⁶ In Zihni Derin’s²⁷ factory and research station, however, and in the tea law of 1940, the foundation of changes to come had already been laid. In the absence of a native bourgeoisie, it was the strong state which necessarily played the decisive role in transforming the Rize region.²⁸ The Laz region owed its economic

²⁴ Michael E. Meeker, “The Great Family Aghas of Turkey: A Study of a Changing Political Culture”, in R. Antounan i. Harik (eds.) *Rural Politics and Social Change in the Middle East* (Bloomington, Indiana University Pres, 1972, p.237-66 Cited in Chris M. Hann, 1990

²⁵ Chris M. Hann, 1990, p. 61

²⁶ *ibid*, p. 11

²⁷ The agriculturalist staff of the state Zihni Derin had a leading role in bringing tea farming to the region.

²⁸ Chris M. Hann, 1990, p. 11

boom to statist principles based paradoxically on the Democrat Party's general anti-statist attitude who ruled the country in 1950s.

Tea farming enabled the state to embody itself in the Laz region physically via tea collecting centers (*çay alım evleri*) and factories. People collect their land's tea and bring it to the centers; almost every village has its own collecting center nowadays. After collection, the tea goes to the factories in order to undergo the tea drying and packaging process.

Tea farming became an important source of employment for Laz men who had previously gone abroad for work: they could now work at collecting centers or in the factories. Most men (this wage-labour force has always been almost exclusively male) obtained unskilled jobs, with contracts guaranteeing only 120 days annually. Moreover they earned a state pension after only twenty years.²⁹

State investments in tea factories were supplemented by some important infrastructure improvements completed at about the same time—notably the building of modern roads along the coast. This greatly sped up communications within the Rize region.³⁰ The state's existence was ironically only made possible by opening up roads to the villages in order to deliver tea leaves collected from the villages to the factories. The pathways were not wide enough for state transport vehicles. These roadways, in turn, enabled both male and female family members to go to the town center (*çarşı/noğa*) much more often. This had rapid impacts on the consumption habits. Villagers went to

²⁹ *ibid*, p. 14

³⁰ *ibid*, p. 12

the market to buy products that they had traditionally produced on their own (such as bread, vegetables, cloths, etc).

As tea cultivation progressed, the importance of other agricultural products declined, and the Rize region had to import considerable quantities of agricultural produce from elsewhere. Local markets and shops also carried much new merchandise for which there was now an effective cash demand in the region. In short, the region began to experience an economic boom due entirely to the expansion of a single crop.³¹ Eventually, tea farming caused a dramatic change primarily in the material culture in a short period of time.

The transformation of the material culture inevitably caused a dramatic change in other aspects of the culture. For example, by tea farming, the collective work phenomenon (*meci/imece*) almost disappeared as the form of public sphere changed, and so the related cultural elements like performing work songs consequently. Similarly, by the urbanization process, the weddings and many rituals (particularly music and dance) were transformed when they were moved from villages to the wedding halls in the town or city centers.

Despite the enterprise of the state for the tea industry, public infrastructure and other sectors of the region did not develop. So, the Black Sea region is still on the top of the list for sending immigrants. In addition, during the Özal period in the 1980s, who came to power in 1983, the earlier generous subsidies to the tea industry were cut off by allowing the entrance of the private capital into the tea industry. The pricing went down

³¹ *ibid*, p. 15

after that year; and even though the production went up by transforming more lands to tea fields the earlier income-generating position of tea farming was altered radically.³²

As I have noted before, tea farming could not stop the migration from the region to the big cities. Several factors that seem to have contributed the high rate of migration to urban centers of Turkey could be summarized as follows: first of all, the valuable income-generating position of the tea changed after the 1980s' liberal economic policies where the state's primary role on the economy was curtailed. Moreover, the land was fragmented into very small parcels in line with the patrimonial inheritance customs. Insignificant diversification of the economy outside of tea and the insufficient social and cultural infrastructural developments encouraged the new middle class generation to migrate from the region.

Since the state subsidies to the Laz farmers were enormous, they could save relatively large amounts of money by working in the factories or in the tea collecting points or as tea farmers. This later enabled them to buy modern apartments or to found small businesses in the metropolises. Even though they were not extremely wealthy, they had economic advantages over peasants migrating from the other parts of Anatolia.

Since tea farming requires only five months of labor in the whole year and it is a women-oriented production, even after families moved to the cities the female member(s) of the family continued to go to the hometown in the tea collecting season (three or four times from March-August) and come back to a husband who was free to work in the service sector or state offices. Even if their entire working lives were spent elsewhere, migrants did not give up their share of their patrimony. Some were successful

³² *ibid*, p. 29

in establishing themselves in cities such as Istanbul, but even these retained their lands in the region.³³ For those who have even a tiny piece of land in their hometown, this means an extra source of income from tea.

Tea farming supported by the state obviously enabled the Laz to have upward mobility in terms of class. The average middle class families moved to metropolises while lower middle classes moved to town centers in the region. Both bought their own houses by using money saved from the tea industry. So we can say that the ones who are still living in the region are mostly from lower middle classes. On the other hand, the life in the villages is almost dead, apart from the temporary summer population, due to the dramatic migration movements.

There are many families that have such a life cycle and they differ, with their strong ties with the region, from the upper class migrants who migrated abroad or to the urban centers earlier via maritime or construction businesses.

Since the end of 1990s, tea fields have ceased to generate profits and it has not paid the families to go back to their home regions to collect the tea. In this case, they either hire workers to collect the tea or leave half of the profit to the sharecropper (*yarıcı*). While the sharecropper is either from the family or village, the workers consist of people who have come from different regions over time. Some workers have been from the central Black Sea region, (from Ordu etc,) some are Kurds (who demand the lowest wages) and as a new trend, there are Georgian migrants. This new relationship introduced a certain type of discrimination amongst some Laz. As this relationship

³³ *ibid*, p 8

sharpened the hierarchical class positions between the Laz and Kurds, already hostile due to the prejudices in urban centers.³⁴

Floya Anthias' argument about identity is helpful to formulate the perception of the identity of the Laz in connection to the notion of 'class'. She argues that the "issues of exclusion, political mobilization on the basis of collective identity, and narrations of belonging and otherness cannot be addressed adequately unless they are located within other constructions of difference and identity, particularly around gender and class."³⁵

Thus, I define the contemporary Laz identity in the urban context, as constituted with the middle class values. In this respect, I would like to emphasize the adoption of the hegemonic cultural discourse which made it possible to avoid any marginalization.

Considering the transformation from lower class peasants to middle class community by tea farming, one can say that the Laz community has been quite privileged by the Turkish state. This privilege consequently led them to identify positively with the state; rather than against it,³⁶ concurrent with their historical mission of being 'custodians of the border'. Moreover, the state's imposition of administrative boundaries and the consolidation of village infrastructure have helped to induce some new feelings of community.³⁷ We should also take into account that 'tea' has turned into

³⁴ Aslı Odman says that as the primary workers of the ship yards (*tershane*) in Tuzla were from Black Sea, they became qualified workers compared with after coming Kurds in 1990s with forced migration. This jobshare eventually caused to a hierarchical order and conflict within the workers. (Seminar in Gola Kültür, Sanat ve Ekoloji Derneği, 16 February 2009)

³⁵ Floya Anthias, "New Hybridities, Old Concepts: The Limit of 'Culture', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol. 24, No. 4, July 2001, p. 620

³⁶ Chris M. Hann, *Tea and the Domestication of the Turkish State*, The Eothen Press, Cambridgeshire, England, 1990, p. 66

³⁷ *ibid*, p. 65

a national symbol in the last fifty years. That also connected the Laz to the nation as producers of a ‘national beverage’.

The domestication of the state enabled the majority of the Laz to identify with it—to feel themselves to be, for the first time, members of a national society while many other citizens remained subject to arbitrary power, and large groups including the entire Kurdish minority, for example, was excluded from full societal membership meanwhile.³⁸ That is to say, while the economical and social deprivation by the state constituted the Kurdish identity around a lower class position, those benefits and recognition by the state constituted the Laz identity around a middle class position.

Amongst migrants going to the metropolis and the ones staying in the Laz region, identification with Turkish nationalism has grown stronger since the 1990s. This is the result of many factors. One of the reasons is the domestication of the state as I have mentioned. Another reason is no doubt the cultural policies of the Turkish state since the foundation of the Republic where the ethnic elements were severely despised and the notion of citizenship was idealized within a Turkification process which was well established in modernization discourse. The message to the people was, “if you want to be a part of the civilized, modern nation, you have to leave your ‘old-fashioned’ cultural elements”. In the next section, I would like to review how the cultural policies of the Turkish republic shaped the contemporary Laz identity where the majority of the Laz express their patriotism and loyalty to the state at every opportunity today.

³⁸ *ibid*, p. 73

The Effects of the Cultural Policies of the Nation State on the Laz Identity

As states are not only functional bureaucratic apparatuses, but also powerful actors seeking to dominate the realm of culture, my aim is also to uncover the ideological nature of the state's representation of the Laz identity. Symbolic systems are imbued with power, and various social subjects are constituted by and, in turn, manipulate these representations and their meanings. Here, culture is not used simply as an entity that expresses 'given' and 'distinctive' sets of values but as 'constructed' and 'contingent' regarding its relation to the nation-state and nationalism.³⁹

The basic goal of the architects of national cultures is to provide a link between membership to the political community (state) and belonging to the cultural community (nation), both of which are necessary to confer the status of citizenship. Relying on a modernist programme of culture, states in the West and the rest of the world during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have maintained active policies to shape their own citizens.⁴⁰

Charles Tilly defines a 'top-down' or 'state-led' nationalism where the sovereign state seeks to create a nation by describing and determining its nature and boundaries. Its pioneers have two functions: a) to reform the existing state and b) to modernize people believed to be 'backward'; reforming the state and modernizing the people are closely connected to the formation of the nation including "standardized national languages,

³⁹ Yılmaz Çolak, "Nationalism and the State in Turkey: Drawing the Boundaries of 'Turkish Culture' in the 1930s", *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism*, 3/1, 2003, p. 4

⁴⁰ Tony Bennett, "*Culture: A Reformer's Science*", London: Sage Publication. 1998, p.104 Cited in Yılmaz Çolak, 2003,p. 3

national histories, pageants, ceremonies, songs, banners, museums, schools, and much more”.⁴¹

During the foundation and the following years of the new Turkish Republic, ‘Kemalist nationalism’ can be considered as a top-down, or state-led, nationalism according to Tilly’s definition. Its first goal was to modernize the state and social structures through a project of social engineering. It was a vigorous search from above for the creation of a new nation and the invention of a new Turk by eliminating the popular notions of Islam and Ottoman heritage. Its project of turning existing more-or-less ethnically and culturally heterogeneous people into a nation depended on the binary logic of ‘old’ and ‘new’.⁴² Here, the aim was to transform society by transmuting all traditional structures into a ‘developed’ and ‘civilized’ whole; that is, society became a target for constructing a ‘better’ future.⁴³

The new cultural institutions of the Republic, as both producers and carriers of the official discourse on ‘culture’, became the basic agents for “promoting and imposing a ‘national and secular way of life’ that comprised of prescriptions for people about how to think, perceive life and act. This mentality was seen in terms of the collective notions that the civilizing rulers strove to make part of everyday practice”.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Charles Tilly, ‘The State of Nationalism’, *Critical Review* 10, 2, 1996, p. 299-306. Cited in in Yılmaz Çolak, 2003, p. 3

⁴² Mahmut E. Bozkurt, *Atatürk İhtilali*. 2nd edn. İstanbul: Kaynak Yay (1st edn. İstanbul Üniv. Yay., 1940) 1995 Cited in Yılmaz Çolak, 2003, p. 5

⁴³B. Parekh, ‘Ethnocentricity of the Nationalist Discourse’, *Nations and Nationalism* 1, 1, 1995, p.25-52

⁴⁴ Yılmaz Çolak, 2003, p. 14

Culture as an idea and discourse seemed to express the construction of a ‘modern’ society and ‘civilized’ citizens. Yilmaz says, “the state discourse on culture did not accept the equal value of all forms of life and assumed a strict hierarchy among them. It is hierarchical and radically assimilationist. By setting a strict hierarchy between ‘archaic’, ‘backward’ life forms and ‘modern’, ‘civilized’ ones and applying coercive and non-coercive radical assimilation policies, the politics of culture in the early Republican regime constituted a set of processes employing both exclusion and inclusion.”⁴⁵

The Turkish state’s nation-building process as a whole far exceeds the limits of this research, but I would like to mention some institutions and practices which help to explain how the new nation was imagined and consequently shaped by the Turkish state. Three new state-controlled institutions were rather influential in this context: the Turkish History Society (THS, which worked to write a new history based on a secular past), the Turkish Language Society (TLS, which tried to create a value-free Turkish language), and the People’s Houses (the centers of adult education) were established in 1931. Through the activities of the THS and the TLS the two theses, the Turkish history and language theses, were sustained. Both theses were used to prove that all civilizations were of Turkish origin; that is, Turkish history and language was the mother of world culture. Moreover, the People’s Houses were founded to carry out the people’s education and training (*halk terbiyesi*) through a nation-wide network of practicing new modes of behaviour beside the regular school education.

⁴⁵ *ibid*, p. 15

Hann also makes a crucial point about the role of formal education on the Laz identity: “It is extremely important to note that economic benefits were matched by improvements in the educational system. The very high value placed on formal schooling is another major feature in the contemporary self-image of the Laz, and certainly seemed to me to be borne out in practice. In turn, education influenced trends in migration: those who left Rize were less likely to seek work on ships or in pastry-shops, but increasingly aspired to occupy high positions within the rapidly expanding hierarchies of politics and administration (centered in Ankara), and in commercial life (still concentrated in Istanbul)”.⁴⁶

The expectation from this sort of education was to make the nation a collective whole sharing a similar ideal⁴⁷. The Houses functioned to realize the westernization project through social and cultural activities⁴⁸ where modes of behaving, dressing, speaking, attending a public meeting or concert, and modes of eating were shown in explicit or implicit ways to the masses. In order to appropriate the local cultural elements to the westernization project, the compilations of cultural products were highly significant.⁴⁹ The attempts starting from 1924, to “collect” and “select” folk songs were done through “vouchers” sent to the music teachers in peripheral regions who were charged with making local contacts with the local musicians, compiling folk songs and

⁴⁶ Chris M. Hann, *Tea and the Domestication of the Turkish State*, The Eothen Press, Cambridgeshire, England, 1990, p. 20

⁴⁷ Recep Peker, ‘Halkevleri Açılma Nutku’, *Ülkü* 1 (February): 6-8. 1933 Cited in Yılmaz Çolak, 2003, p.7

⁴⁸ Arzu Özturkmen, *Folklor ve Milliyetçilik*, İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1998, p. 70

⁴⁹ *ibid*, p. 71

recording them by using Western classical written note technique.⁵⁰ These compilations were to be used in the repertoires of *Yurttan Sesler (Tunes From the Country)* in state running TRT radio station adapting the language and lyrics to the ‘Turkish folk music’ (*Türk Halk Müziği*).

“The nation is the political and social unit composed of citizens tied together by the bonds of language, culture and ideal”.⁵¹ In other words, culture together with language and the ideal were the constitutive parts of the nation in that they were fundamental in providing a sense of belonging to the citizens. Key to this process was the teaching of the Turkish language and of Turkish history, in which the Turks’ civilized ancestors had shown the true way to all civilizations through their foundational institutions including the army. Also, fine arts and especially western-style music were privileged by the Party to instill ‘the revolutionary culture’ in the people.⁵²

Despite inheriting a pluralistic cultural structure from the Ottoman Empire, the Turkish Republic constructed its nationality on a monolithic ethnicity: Turkishness. Çagaptay posits the existence of three ‘concentric zones of Turkishness’ in the state discourse on citizenship; the most inclusive zone, based on a territorial definition, defines everyone within the borders of the Turkish Republic as a ‘Turk’ (or Turkish citizen). The second zone, less encompassing than the first, is based on the religious identity of the former Muslim *millet*, third, is equating all Muslims with ‘Turks’ and

⁵⁰ Mustafa Poyraz Kolluoğlu, “*Modernism in Ottoman Empire and Turkish Music and the Years of 1930s, 1940s*”, *Unpublished MA Thesis*, Marmara University, International Relations Department, April 2010, p. 56

⁵¹ Yılmaz Çolak, “*Nationalism and the State in Turkey: Drawing the Boundaries of ‘Turkish Culture’ in the 1930s*”, *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism*, 3/1,2003, p. 11

⁵² *ibid*, p. 11

fourth, but excluding non- Muslim citizens. A third zone adds Turkish ethnicity as a criterion and is thus the most exclusionary; it means that both non-Muslims⁵³ and non-Turks are excluded from this definition.⁵⁴ The expectation is that non-Turkish Muslims will eventually be assimilated and this has encouraged the denial of the existence of the non-Turkish Muslim community like Laz, Kurds, *Homilies*, Caucasians, etc. by the state and most political parties.

However, a parallel awareness of the ‘not-quite Turkish ness’ of those ethnic groups has been translated into a discourse that camouflages ethnicity and replaces it with the ‘regional difference’ discourse. Since the “ethnic differences” were reduced to the level of “regional differences,” all the regions were represented as if they were local versions of ‘Turkish ness’. Moreover, the ethnic minorities began to be represented via the common homogeneous stereotypes: Backward/ Separatist Kurds, Stupid/ Cunning/ Patriotic Lazes, etc...

Even though there is a common history within which many ethnic groups were exposed to more or less coercion in that period, one should note the different historical processes that occurred for different ethnic, cultural groups.

For example, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Armenians, became a ‘minority’ in their homeland by the establishment of the nation-state through the “massacres, deportations, forced migration and the discrimination policies”.⁵⁵ Melissa

⁵³ And non- Sunni Muslims

⁵⁴ Soner Çagaptay, *Islam, Secularism and Nationalism in Modern Turkey: Who is a Turk?* London and New York: Routledge, 2006. p 159-160 cited in ‘Çeliker, Anna Grabolle(2009) 'Construction of the Kurdish Self in Turkey through Humorous Popular Culture', *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, 30: 1, 89 — 105’

⁵⁵ Melissa Bilal, “*The Lost Lullaby and Other Stories About Being an Armenian in Turkey*”, Unpublished MA Thesis, Sociology Department, Boğaziçi University, 2004, p.10

Bill says that, “since Turkishness, ‘Turkish national culture’ and the official ‘Turkish History’ were constructed and shaped through the social and economic expropriation of the local heritage and wealth, and the denial of the Armenian as well as other ethnic identities and cultures in the nationalized territory, everything that referred to the presence of Armenians in Anatolia was silenced”.⁵⁶ In her thesis, Bilal suggests that the experience of this ‘displacement’ and ‘loss’ define the sense of being an Armenian in Turkey today.⁵⁷ The very result of the Purification practices during the institutionalization period of the republic has been the displacement of different ethnic groups from the collective memories of people living in Turkey and the cultural representations of the Anatolian geography. These groups started to be regarded as ‘foreigners’ in their homelands.⁵⁸

Likewise, the Kurds experienced similar discriminatory, violent and exclusive policies which had a decisive influence in shaping contemporary Kurdish identity.⁵⁹ “The relations of domination between the state and the Kurds involved systematic persecution, marginalization and humiliation of Kurdishness since 1925”.⁶⁰ The Turkish state’s coercive and assimilationist practices such as compulsory Turkish-language education and military service together with practices of discrimination targeted to

⁵⁶ Melissa Bilal, 2004, p.12

⁵⁷ *ibid*, p.7

⁵⁸ *ibid*, p. 38

⁵⁹ Hakan M. Yavuz, ‘Five Stages of the Construction of Kurdish Nationalism in Turkey’, *Nationalism & Ethnic Politics* 7, Autumn, 2001, p. 1 Cited in Murat Tezcür, Güneş, “Kurdish Nationalism and Identity in Turkey: A Conceptual Reinterpretation”, *European Journal of Turkish Studies*, V. 10, 2009

⁶⁰ Hamit Bozarslan, ‘Why the Armed Struggle?’ Understanding the violence in Kurdistan of Turkey’, in İbrahim Ferhad; Gürbey Gülistan (eds.) *The Kurdish Conflict in Turkey*, New York, St. Martin’s Press, 2000, p.187 Cited in Murat Tezcür Güneş, 2009

Kurdish workers in Turkish cities have contributed to the formation of a radicalized Kurdish nationalist identity.⁶¹

When we look at the Laz people in their relationship with the Turkish state historically, it wouldn't be unfair to say that they were not exposed to the same level of persecution compared to 'dangerous identities' such as the Kurds and Armenians. However, the Laz also experienced pressure from assimilationist policies which influenced the contemporary Laz identity greatly.

James Ferguson and Akhil Gupta claim that "the state (conceptually fused with the nation) is located within an ever-widening series of circles that begins with family and local community and ends with the system of nation-states. This is profoundly consequential understanding of scale, one in which locality is encompassed by the region, the region by the nation-state, and the nation state by the international community."⁶² According to their argument, "national, as opposed to local, was positioning "lower-level" workers, "local" politicians, and "local villagers as people who belonged to, and articulated the interests of, particular communities, with limited generalizability across geographical areas, or across class and caste divisions."⁶³ Assuming the spatializing of the state, as a governmental method, they question "by what mechanisms were certain people fixed in space as local people with local concerns

⁶¹Mustafa Saatci 'Nation-states and ethnic boundaries: modern Turkish identity and Turkish- Kurdish conflict', *Nations and Nationalism* 8 (4), October, 2002, p. 549-564. Cited in Güneş, 2009.

⁶² James Ferguson, Akhil Gupta, Spatializing States: Toward an Ethnography of Neoliberal Governmentality, *Anthropologies of Modernity, Foucault, Governmentality, and Life Politics*, Edited by: Jonathan Xavier Inda, University of California, Santa Barbara, 2005, p. 106

⁶³ *ibid*, p. 113

while others came to be seen, and to see themselves, as concerned with “larger” issues that traversed geographical and political space.”⁶⁴

Similarly, Anna Tsing⁶⁵ claims that, the nation state and global capital are the determinant subjects who make up a ‘scaling’ enabling us to imagine what is global, what is national and what is local. According to this scaling, I claim that the Laz imagined themselves as a ‘local’ cultural group rather than a ‘nation’ in contrast with Kurds or Armenians. This is the reason and also the outcome of the political position of the Laz. Despite some efforts to describe the Laz as a nation, the Laz Cultural Movement, an intellectual movement in 1990s, did not turn into a mass movement, a question that I will elaborate later.

Obviously, there are some facts, as I mentioned earlier, that enabled the Laz to ‘imagine’ themselves as a part of the nation and attempted to adjust themselves within it. But, I would like to emphasize that the hierarchical scaling between national and local prevented the Laz culture from adapting itself to ‘the modern life’ and caused a dramatic rupture in the public cultural memory. This rupture later enabled the Laz to imagine themselves as ‘insufficient’ and prevented them from demanding cultural rights from the state concurring with other facts such as not to be marked like Kurds. For example, Laz musician Birol Topaloğlu was complaining about this fact:

We (Lazis) were made (by the state) not to think about ‘our’ music at all. When I was in the university I was interested in folk music (*halk muziği*) through Karacaoğlu, Aşık Veysel and other Turkish musicians therefore I started music by playing *bağlama*

⁶⁴ *ibid*, p. 113

⁶⁵ Anna Tsing, “Inside the Economy of Appearances”, *Public Culture* - Volume 12, Number 1, Winter 2000, pp. 115-144

like my elder brothers as it was quite common. However it took me ages to think about “our” (Laz) music. We had “*destans*”(epic songs), “*bgaras*” (weeper songs) but these were not considered “music” at all. That struck me instantly and I left *bağlama* and started to compile *destans* and eventually played *tulum* and *kemençe*.⁶⁶

Similarly, I came across frequent discussions among the Laz, even if the state would allow the Laz, for example, to broadcast in the Laz language, some argue that they would not accomplish it. A related debate was also held about the education in the mother language in the schools. This sense of ‘inadequacy’ makes me think that Lazness has been emasculated and therefore lost its means to reproduce itself. I find such accounts of the intellectuals quite significant while they are the most optimistic about the future of the Laz culture.

Language, still one of the determinant signifiers of an ethnic group, enables cultural members to transfer their ethnic identity to the next generations despite the hegemonic governance of the state on the individuals. As I find a straightforward relationship between language and ethnicity in terms of ethnic identification, I would say that the most concrete effect of assimilation policies on Laz culture has been on Laz language which I would like to focus on in the following section.

⁶⁶ “Bizler (Lazlar) müziğimizi düşünemez hale getirildik. Üniversitedeyken halk müziği ile ilgilenmeye başladım, Karacaoğlan, Aşık Veysel ve diğer Türk ozanlarını tanıyarak diğer abilerim gibi ben de bağlamaya başladım. Kendi müziğimiz üzerine düşünmeye başlamak çok sonra oldu. Oysa destanlarımız, bgaralarımız vardı. Ama bunlar müzikten sayılmıyorlardı. Sonra birden dank etti ve bağlamayı bırakıp destanlar derlemeye başladım sonra da tulum ve kemençe çalmayı öğrendim.” The interview with the Laz musician Birol Topaloğlu, 28.4.2010, Balat

The Decisive Categories of the State on Language and Abandonment of the Laz Language

When we look into the ways of cultural legitimation adopted during the early history of the Turkish Republic, it turns to be obvious that its discourse is embedded in a dichotomy, the traditional/modern as I referred to earlier. Modernist ideology of the Turkish nation-state was stipulating to appropriate the local features of the culture and give way to nationalization through a westernization process in order to go ‘forward’ in history. In short, Turkification went hand in hand with westernization and technical development in the agenda of the new-born republic. It would be convenient to cite Mustafa Kemal himself in order to explore the mentality of the cultural policies of the new republic:

There are some people who define civilization in different ways. In my opinion it is hard and unnecessary to separate civilization from culture. In order to clarify my point of view, let me explain what culture is: it is the product of all achievements of a human society in the domains of (a) state, (b) thought, that is to say, science, social science, and fine arts, and (c) economy, that is to say, agriculture, crafts, trade, transportation and communication. When one talks about a nation’s civilization, I think it may not be other than a product of all these three kind of domains. Of course, the degree of culture, or civilization, could not be the same. The difference may be seen in each sphere of life, as well as the agglomeration of three spheres. A high culture does not only belong to its owner nation, and, at the same time, has strong effects on other nations. Maybe, it is in this respect that a high and extensive culture is called civilization, such as European civilization, *asr-i hazır* (modern) civilization⁶⁷

⁶⁷Afet A. İnan, *M. Kemal Atatürk’ten Yazdıklarım* (My Writings from Mustafa Kemal Atatürk). Ankara: Altınok Matbaası, 1969, p. 48, Cited in Yılmaz Çolak, 2003, p. 8

What is significant here is the setting of a hierarchy between a high/cultivated culture and a local / primitive/ one. And the first is positioned as a national end to be realized.

When I searched for the reflections of that ideology on the public memories of the Laz, I found out that the temporality of Lazness is strongly embedded in the past. When the past is associated with lower standards of life and hardship, then the past is inevitably considered to be unpleasant. That is to say, Lazness which was highly associated with being a villager (*köylülük*) was tried to be abandoned in order to be a part of the civilized nation, and become a modern, acceptable citizen.

When the state encountered with a multi-cultural and consequently multi-lingual society, this made the assimilation a harder task to achieve during its founding years. So the first thing to do was to give priority to the national language and eliminate the other ethnic languages by condemning their use in the public sphere.⁶⁸ A good example of this is the ‘*Vatandaş Türkçe Konuş!*’⁶⁹ campaigns which took place in the 1940s and 1950s⁷⁰ discouraging citizens from speaking their mother languages besides Turkish in the public sphere.⁷¹

⁶⁸ Hüseyin Sadoğlu, *Türkiye’de Ulusçuluk ve Dil Politikaları*, İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayınları, İstanbul, 2003, p. 36

⁶⁹ Citizen! Speak Turkish!

⁷⁰ Even it was not articulated that evidently, condemning of those languages in the public sphere appeared commonly until 1990s .

⁷¹ Yahya Koçoğlu, *Hatırlıyorum*, Metis Yayıncılık, İstanbul, Koçoğlu, Yahya, (2001) Azınlık Gençleri Anlatıyor, Metis Yayıncılık, İstanbul, 2003

From Walter Benjamin's⁷² point of view, it is the state who defines what the law is and what is outside of the law. Thereby, its hegemony is what enables the state to intervene in people's languages and even forbid them despite the fact that language is a constitutive feature of a human being. With this concept, the state constructs the people and itself through certain categories. These categories obviously should be considered as an extension of the 'scaling' of the 'local', 'national' and 'universal' boundaries constituted by the state as I mentioned earlier. In order to explain my argument of how those categories are constituted around 'language', let me demonstrate it with a simple chart.

National Language: Turkish	Ethnic Languages: 'Others'
Modern Competent Valuable Literate	Primitive Inefficient Insignificant Oral

When the language is divided into these hierarchical binary categories, there are two unconscious strategies left for people in order to survive: the first is to internalize the national language and abandon their ethnic languages, and the second is to object and fight against the state. Obviously, the Laz have chosen the first while the Kurds have chosen the latter concurrent with their historical conditions.

⁷² Walter Benjamin, "Critique of Violence" *Reflections*, (Ed.) Hannah Arendt. Schocken Books. New York, 1986

Now, I would like to demonstrate how the national discourse on “language” affects peoples’ memories. The Kurdish writer Mehmed Uzun shares a related anecdote:

In Siverek, on my first school day I got a slap in the face, which I can still remember very well. We were speaking Kurdish while lining-up in the school garden. The soldier-originated teacher from Istanbul slapped me in my face to make me speak Turkish. But how! I didn’t even know Turkish!(...) I was acquainted with Turkish with a single slap! My relationship with my mother-tongue broke off since that moment.⁷³

It is pretty striking to listen to a similar anecdote from a Laz:

I wasn’t even aware of another language at that age. What would I do if I didn’t speak Laz! Should we speak the language that our teachers did? I thought, our teachers spoke Turkish very well indeed. To be honest, we were envious of them. However it was not more than ten words that we could speak in that language, so what to do? At these times, “don’t speak Laz” meant “don’t speak at all!” At first our mouths were almost locked and we were left speechless...⁷⁴

Taylor, explains how people learn to become ‘citizens’ by sensing and observing. “People not only cultivated the official look, their bodies underwent change. Though they were generally despondent; they became increasingly alert to dangers around them. Their senses and protective instincts became more acute. They learned to

⁷³ "Siverek'te ilkokulun birinci günü bir tokat yedim, bugün bile aklımdan çıkmaz. Okul bahçesinde sıraya girmeye çalışırken aramızda Kürtçe konuşuyorduk. Bir tokat attı İstanbul'lu yedek subay öğretmen, Türkçe konuş diye. Ama Türkçe bilmiyordum ki(...)Ben de bir tokatla tanıştım Türkçeyle. Benim anadilimle bağım böyle koptu" (Milliyet Gazetesi 17/11/2006)

⁷⁴ "...O yaşımda başka bir dilin varlığını bile bilmiyordum. Lazca konuşmayacaktım da ne konuşacaktım ki? Yoksa biz, hani şu öğretmenlerimizin konuştuğu dilden mi konuşacaktık? Öğretmenler Türkçeyi bana göre çok güzel konuşuyorlardı. Açıkçası imreniyorduk. Ama o dilden bildiğimiz on kelimeyi geçmiyordu ki, nasıl olacaktı bu iş? O zamanlar bizim için "Lazca konuşma" demek, "Hiç konuşma" demekle eşti. İlk zamanlar adeta ağızımız kilitlenmişti. Dilsiz kalmıştık..." Ali İhsan Aksamaz-Turabi Saltık, Şükrü Güvenç, Eyüp Demir, Kemal Kök, *Anadilde Eğitim ve Azınlık Hakları*, Sorun Yayınları, 2005, İstanbul

‘read’ others’ bodies, a new system of signs and codes, just as they are exposed to observation. (...) Individuals policed themselves, internalizing the surveiling eye.”⁷⁵

According to Begona, “the state, materializes not only through rules and bureaucratic routines but also through a world of fantasy thoroughly narrativized and imbued with affect, fear, and desire that make it, in fact a plausible reality.”⁷⁶ In the Turkish Republic’s foundation history, the ‘teachers’ played a crucial role to make people internalize the new national value system. And it was the teachers’ fantasy to turn the people into a homogeneous citizens. The following lines are probably belong to a teacher from a local magazine in Rize published in 1973:

There have been several languages spoken in Turkey for long time. One of them is spoken in some towns of Rize and Çoruh. For some reasons they call it Laz. We are not going to tell about the origins of this language, we don’t care at all anyway. Our aim is to explain how it is harmful and worthless.(...)We understand that Laz language is not important at all and it is a very fake language. And it will inevitably die. There is no written work so there is no need to learn this language. (...) So we should kill off this language as there is no source to survive.(...)If the education institutions and the families work together and teach the children Turkish in the first place the task would be achieved. So the next generations can be preserved from the harmful aspects of this language. (...)⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Diana Taylor, “The Theatre of Operations: Performing Nation-ness in the Public Sphere" *Disappearing Acts: Spectacles of Gender and Nationalism in Argentina's 'Dirty War.'* Duke University Press, 1997, p. 107

⁷⁶Begona Aretxaga , *A Fictional Reality: Paramilitary Death Squads and the Construction of State Terror in Spain, Death Squad The Anthropology of State Terror*, Jeffrey A. Sluka, Editor University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999, p, 52

⁷⁷ “Türkiye’de öteden beri çeşitli diller yaşamaktadır. Bunlardan biri de Rize’nin bazı kazalarında hususiyetle Pazar, Ardeşen, Fındıklı ve bir de Çoruh’un bir iki ilçesinde konuşulmaktadır. Bu dile nedense Lazca ismi atfedilir. Lazca’nın menşei bizi ilgilendirmedığı gibi onun üzerine söz edecek de değildir. Konumuzun ilişeceği husus bu dilin mahzurları ve değersizliğidir.(...) Bütün bunlardan anlıyoruz ki, Lazca hiçbir önemi ve değeri olmayan çok sahte bir dildir. Üstelik daima da dilin ucunda kalmaya mahkumdur. Lazca yazılmış hiçbir yapıt yoktur. Dolayısıyla bunu bilmenin hiçbir yararı görülmemiştir.

In this quotation, one can easily observe the writer's self position as a missionary appropriating the local values to the nation while constituting him/herself as a representative of the state. As Timothy Mitchell emphasizes, "the boundary between the state and civil society is far from being fixed as it appears to be. On the contrary, this boundary is elusive, uncertain and therefore unable to mark the position of real exteriority for the state."⁷⁸ Benjamin also points out that the 'police' is a ghostly embodiment of the modern state and 'its power is formless, like its nowhere-tangible, all-pervasive, ghostly presence in the life of the civilized states.'⁷⁹ If we accept that, the 'police' does not always have to be a paid employee of the state but also the missionary civilians who mimic the state itself, the following citation might be relevant:

...In 1930's, there was a job share between students like cleaning, first aid, etc. Among those, there was a duty of 'fighting with Laz speakers'.⁸⁰ I was the chief of this duty⁸¹ in my fourth and fifth years in the primary school. We were doing it voluntarily because all the students and teachers were Laz originated and neither of them were able to speak Turkish properly. The duty of 'fighting with Laz speakers' did not make any sense for me because, even I was doing my part and warning the Laz speakers, when I got home, I was totally inefficient in

Öyleyse bu dilin kökünü kazımalıyız.(...) Zira bu dili ayakta tutacak hiçbir kaynak yok... Maarif ile ailelerin elbirliğiyle çalışmaları yeter. Her aile en azından öğretmen kadar kendi çocuğu üzerinde dursa ve ona doğuştan Türkçe'yi öğretse dava zamanla halledilmiş olur ve çocuklar da bu acayip dilin şerrinden kurtulmuş olur. 'Kemençe Dergisi, V: 2, 1973 Cited in Koçiva, Selma, Lazona Laz Halk Gerçekliği Üzerine, Tüm Zamanlar Yayıncılık, İstanbul, 2000, p 182

⁷⁸ Timothy Mitchell, "The limits of the State: Beyond the Statist Approaches and Their Critics", *American Political Science Review*, 85:1, 1991, p. 90-91 cited in Begona, 1999, p. 52

⁷⁹ Walter Benjamin, "Critique of Violence" Reflections. Ed. Hannah Arendt. Schocken Books. New York, 1986, p. 243

⁸⁰ *Lazca ile mücadele kolu*

⁸¹ Latif Özdemir mentions a similar experience on the Kurdish language. Özdemir, Latif 'Vatandaş Türkçe konusu', 2000, http://www.demanu.com.tr/rojateze/10.11.2000/kose_yazilari/Latifoedemir.html

preventing my grandparents, neighbours from speaking Laz. Inevitably, I used to speak Laz with them. This was a horrific implementation that might have cause a child to be double-faced.⁸²

In short, either implemented by external or internal forces, the assimilation of the Laz language deeply affected the lives of the Laz people. However, this assimilation did not lead to a mass reaction and consequently into a reflectionist Laz identity (like it has been the case for the Kurds) because these policies went in parallel with the state-led economic policies mostly favoring the Laz.

The Urbanization Process and the Introversion of the Laz Identity

When Laz community moved to metropolises largely after the 1980s, they settled down with their solidarity relations such as kins or fellow countryman and with a decent capital to build or buy their houses in the city. They were not, at least, rootless proletarians thanks to their tea gardens left in their hometowns. Even though there are some exceptional cases, the general panorama has been in that way.

However, the migrants, who had divergent cultural values in their hometowns suffered from an inevitable ‘cultural shock’. At the end, some of them went back to their

⁸² “...Otuzlu yıllarda okullarda Temizlik ve İntizam Kolu, Kızılay Kolu... gibi isimlerle çalışma kolları oluşturulurdu... Bunlar arasında “Lazca Konuşanlarla Mücadele Kolu” diye bir kol daha vardı. Ben dördüncü ve beşinci sınıfta iken bir müddet bu kolun başkanlığını yaptığımı hatırlıyorum... Bu işi... faydalı olduğuna inanarak yapardık. Çünkü talebeler de öğretmenler de Laz kökenli idiler ve Türkçeleri meramlarını ifade edemeyecek kadar bozuktu...Lazca Konuşanlarla Mücadele Kolu”ndaki faaliyetlerime bir anlam veremezdim. Çünkü okulda tamam; Lazca konuşanlara ihtarımı yapardım, ama eve gelince, köye çıkınca hiç Türkçe bilmeyen babaannem, dedem, komşuma hiç etkili olamıyordum. Hal böyle olunca, onlarla ben de Lazca konuşuyordum... Bir çocuğun ikiyüzlü gelişmesinde felâket etkili olacak bir uygulama.” Ali İhsan Aksamaz (Editor) <http://www.kolkhoba.org/makaletrk6.htm>

hometowns while others survived at the expense of the first generation to be excluded in the ‘integration’ project.

People, who were alien to the ‘modern’ life in the city had tough experiences where the modernity project assumed a quick integration of the villagers’ to the urban life, leaving behind their ‘primitive’ cultural values in the village.

Like the *gecekondu* (shanty towns) problem itself, the state was inadequate in terms of planning for the cultural needs of the populace.⁸³ Thus, Laz migrants as well as others had to find their own way to adapt their cultural background to the city and isolate the distinct aspects of the culture to be expressed either at home or in hometown associations.

The perception of Lazness was not only associated with the unpleasant past, but also spatially to the ‘village/Laz region/Black Sea’ as an outcome of the modernization project of the Turkish-state. Because “the modern cities are rather designed for the nation-states where all the differences are melted in a pot.”⁸⁴ Locality is only tolerated in the form of nostalgia⁸⁵ or when it is marketable in the private sphere.

In my interviews, particularly the Laz women were telling me, how the young women in the village desired to marry with white-collar workers in order to have a chance to get out of the village work. Even though the migrants suffered a lot in the city,

⁸³ Martin Stokes, *The Arabesk Debate: Music and Musicians in Modern Turkey*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, New York; Oxford University Press. 1992, p.10

⁸⁴ Sibel Demirtaş, Bülent Diken, İftar B. Gözüaydın, “Mekan ve Ötekiler”, *Defter*, V. 28, Metis Yayıncılık, 1996, p. 40

⁸⁵ I refer to the term nostalgia in line with Rosaldo who takes it as “a dead, innocuous creature jettisoned the politics.” (Rosaldo, 1992) For example, the Laz accent can be tolerated unlike the Laz language spoken in the public sphere.

city life was a dream for the ones left in the village. I also remember that it was the fantasy in our childhood plays to move to Istanbul. In the end, Lazness was attached with tough village life conditions to be left away and inevitably people either in the village or in the city were eager to consume the boons of the modern life.

Apparently the migrant Laz women who had less contact with the ‘outside’ in the village suffered more compared to the male members of the household when they came to the city. That is to say, they were not familiar with the public sphere and formal relations in the city in comparison to men who had always contacts with the city either through trading or working due to their gender role as men. Because of the faint relation with the city, or the town center in the hometown, women had a bad command of Turkish, and therefore there had a great desire to learn it. During my interviews, I listened to a lot of anecdotes about the mimicry of Turkish or the adoption of the customs of the urban life and their consequent failure. Even though they were sad, those stories were told with a sense of humour.

As I mentioned earlier, urban life assumes a kind of fusion and thus abandonment of the local cultural values for a successful adaptation. The first to leave in the village was of course the ‘language’ or at most it has to be kept in the houses. This would cause the Laz language to be the language of privacy.

A twenty year old, second generation member of a migrant family, Eren Dağıstanlı says that his parents were speaking Laz when they did not want their children to understand them.⁸⁶ Similarly, I felt like speaking Laz with my family or friends when

⁸⁶ Interview with Eren Dağıstanlı, From the archive of BGST(Boğaziçi Gösteri Sanatları Topluluğu) in Boğaziçi University, 2009

talking about something private in the public sphere giving the impression of carrying a secret that only very few people know.

The problems connected to language have been the toughest experience for the Laz migrants, these obstructed them from socializing with others in the city at first.

Once, I was asked to lecture in class. As soon as I opened my mouth, everybody laughed at me. I was terribly ashamed, so I promised myself that my children would not suffer from this (Laz) language. Indeed, my dream came true but in that case my children couldn't learn their mother tongue.⁸⁷

There was a clear belief that the Laz language was extremely detrimental to the Turkish accent and as a result meant failure at integration process.⁸⁸ This general belief led to a turning point for my generation, born after the 1980s, when the parents stopped speaking Laz with their children. Thus, transmittance of the Laz language suffered a dramatic rupture with the next generations. My generation was lucky to still have a familiarity with the language which enabled us to understand but not able to speak fluently but having a decisive accent revealing contextually.

The next generation (born in the 1990s) has even a more fading relation with the Laz language, particularly the ones who were born in the city and learned Turkish from TV channels and schools rather than their families. On the other hand, the language was an enormous trouble for the former generations. The following example shows how the language turns into a matter of survival and a primary concern in people's lives.

⁸⁷ Interviews, October, 2007, Istanbul.

⁸⁸ Murat Çakır expresses his anger to such a mentality common in his family who considered speaking Laz as obscurantism who detained him speaking his mother tongue. Koçiva, Selma, *Lazona Laz Halk Gerçekliği Üzerine*, Tüm Zamanlar Yayıncılık, İstanbul, 2000, p 182

I am Laz, and naturally I have a Laz accent of Turkish. This is similar to a Turk's bad English speaking. However, people were laughing at me thanks to my accent in school, in the street...My efforts to speak Turkish without an accent became the main fact that conducted my and my families' lives. Not to be aggrieved, we left Istanbul and moved back to Ardeşen. I failed at school and lost a whole year consequently. Was it because I was stupid, or lazy? No, it was just because I was speaking and thinking in another language.⁸⁹

Kamil Aksoylu emphasizes that the humiliation he felt when ridiculed by the others, was worst than any punishment and violence that he had to face.

When we come together with our friends, the subject eventually comes to the old days. When I visited one of my friend who is now a state officer, he brought out his childhood memories again which was a trauma for both of us. As we all referred to *findık* (hazelnut) as *'funduk'*⁹⁰ and even worse, *'findik'* when try to correct it. Similarly we called *Türkçe* as *'Turkçe'*. Once, one of our teachers in the secondary school failed in his/her attempts to make him repeat the word during the whole lesson and our friend was relieved when we heard the bell. Similarly, I memorialized one of my friend in the army, who was saying first *'boluk'* instead of *bölük* (troop) and the commander kept him saying *'bööö'* sound for half an hour but he was still failing at pronouncing."⁹¹

⁸⁹ “Ben Laz’dım, ana dilim Lazcaydı ve doğaldır ki, Türkçeyi aksanlı konuşuyordum. Bu bir Türk’ün İngilizce’yi kötü konuşması gibi bir şeydi. Ama aksanım yüzünden bana gülüyorlardı. Sokakta, okulda böyleydi bu. Türkçeyi aksansız konuşma çabası, adeta hayatımı ve giderek ailemin hayatını yönlendiren başlıca neden olmuştu. Mağdur olmayalım diye İstanbul’u terk ederek Ardeşen’e dönmüştük örneğin. Sınıfta kalmış, bir yıl kaybetmişim. Aptal olduğumdan mı? Yoksa tembelliğimden mi? İkisi de değil, ben başka bir dili konuşuyor ve düşünüyordum.” Özcan Sapan, “Lazcayı Yok Etmenin Dayanılmazlığı http://www.lazuri.com/tkvani_ncarepe/t_u_lazcayi_yoketmenin_dayanilmazligi.html

⁹⁰ There are no ı, ü, ö, ü sounds in Laz, where one can sense their shortage in the Laz accent of Turkish.

⁹¹ “Bazen çocukluk arkadaşlarımla bulduğumuzda söz dönüp dolaşıp eski günlere geliyor. Geçenlerde şu an devlet memuru olan bir arkadaşım İstanbul’da misafir oldum. Söz dönüp dolaşıp bu konulara gelince de, ne onun ne de benim hayatımda unutamayacağımız o travma anısını yine anlattı. Hepimiz gibi arkadaşımız da doğal olarak *findık* derken ya *'funduk'* diyorduk ya da düzeltelim derken daha da berbat edip *'findik'* diyordu. Türkçe diyemeyip *'Turkçe'* diyordu. Ortaokul ikinci sınıfta Türkçe hocamızın tam bir ders boyunca tekrar ettirmesine rağmen bu arkadaşımıza *'Türkçe'* dedirdemediğini ve zilin çalmasıyla nasıl bir *'ohhh'* çektiğini yeniden yad ettik. Ben de askerde bir arkadaşımın *'birinci bölük'* derken *'boluk'* dediğini, *bölük* komutanımızın defalarca tekrar ettirmesinde de *'bölük'* diyemeyen bu

At this point I will argue that, even though I claim that the Laz suffered from the humiliation and exclusion due to their language, particularly in the public sphere, I don't think this treatment was interpreted as a consequence of being Laz but being 'villager' (*köylü*) referring to a primitive and undesirable culture.⁹² Therefore this did not solidify the Laz collective identity as a whole as in the case of the Kurds, apart from a minority who lately dedicate themselves to the revitalization of the Laz language.

Beside language, I claim that the general attitude towards the whole 'old' way of life was despised due to the same reasons by the majority of the Laz, apart from some romantic intellectuals.

Denizhan Özer talked about how people in the village left their wood-stone structured houses of traditional architecture⁹³ -which evidently made them sick due to rheumatism- houses to be ruined, and enthusiastically built their houses made of concrete. He said that they were making fun of him when he said he wanted to live in their family wood-stone house. It was not a comprehensible manner for the people to feel sympathy for the 'old'.⁹⁴

arkadaşımıza yine bölük komutanımız yarım saat bööö diye ses verdiğini ama arkadaşımızın boooooo demekten vazgeçemedğini anlattım.” (Kamil Aksoylu, *Laz Kültürü, Tarih, Dil, Gelenek ve Toplumsal Yapı*, Phoenix Yayınevi, Ankara, 2009, p. 74)

⁹² Ahıska declares how the concept of 'villager' is rather contradictory “while ‘Anatolian People’ (Anadolu insanı) were represented as abject, to be eliminated but at the same time desired” in the public realm. Meltem Ahıska, *Kimlik Kavramı Üstüne Fragmanlar, Defter*, V. 27, Metis Yayıncılık, İstanbul. 1996, p. 25

⁹³ *Geleneksel dolmataş mimarisi*

⁹⁴ The presentation of the international Laz curator Denizhan Özer at 5. Yeşil Yayla, Kültür, Sanat ve Çevre Festivali, in Arhavi/ Artvin, August 2010

I interpret the late commercialization of the Laz cuisine within the same context. Laz cuisine was considered to be a local, undesirable (for the non-Laz) cuisine only cooked in homes until a couple of years ago when the traditional cuisines became a commercial and touristic trend.

When we moved to Istanbul, my mother cooked for her non-Laz neighbours from Laz cuisine just when they asked her to do and praised their taste. Similarly, when we asked her to cook *Laz Böreği* (a sweet pastry) in our restaurant, she decided not to put any black pepper assuming that the non-Laz would find the black pepper strange inside a desert. I interpret her attitude as an apologetic mentality about the Laz cuisine assuming its taste as strange.

The Constitution of the Laz Identity in Antagonism to the Kurdish Identity

Stuart Hall says that “in common sense language, identification is constructed on the back of a recognition of some common origin or shared characteristics with another person or group, or with an ideal, and with the natural closure of solidarity and allegiance established on this foundation. In contrast with the ‘naturalism’ of this definition, the discursive approach sees identification as a construction, a process never completed- always ‘in process’. It is not determined in the sense that it is always ‘won’ or ‘lost’, sustained or abandoned.”⁹⁵ He says, “the total merging it suggests is, in fact, a fantasy of incorporation. Identification is, then, a process of articulation, a suturing, an

⁹⁵ Stuart Hall, “Who Needs ‘Identity’?” in *Questions of Cultural Identity*, edited by Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay, Sage Publications, London, 1998, p. 2

over-determination not a consumption. There is always 'too much' or 'too little'—an over-determination or a lack, but never a proper fit, a totality. Like all signifying practices, it is subject to the 'play,' of *différance*. It obeys the logic of more-than-one. And since as a process it operates across difference, it entails discursive work, the binding and marking of symbolic boundaries, the production of 'frontier- effects'. It requires what is left outside, its constitutive outside, to consolidate the process.”⁹⁶

The concept of identity deployed here is therefore not an essentialist, but a strategic and positional one. That is to say, directly contrary to what appears to be its settled semantic career, this concept of identity does *not* signal that stable core of the self, unfolding from beginning to end through all the vicissitudes of history without change, the bit of the self which remains always-already 'the same', identical to itself across time.⁹⁷

In this respect, the facts that enable the Laz to differentiate themselves from the 'others' change contextually. For example, a Laz villager in the Laz region would probably differentiate her/himself in a particular way referring to his/her *Hemşinli* or Turk neighbours. Or maybe, not even as a matter of ethnicity but as a matter of everyday practices, s/he would define her/himself in opposition to the people from a lower *mahalle* (*parish*). However, I suggest that the constitution of the Laz identity constructed with the Kurdish identity in the last two decades, especially in the urban context.

That is to say, Laz identity has been positioned as an opposite of the Kurdish identity particularly after 1980s, when the Kurdish nationalism was on the rise. The Laz

⁹⁶ *ibid*, p. 2-3

⁹⁷ *ibid*, p. 3

resembled the Kurds in terms of their village origin and bilingual character, but differed in their historical relationship with the state.

One might think that this differentiation mechanism emerged once the physical interaction occurred in the metropolis as a place of ‘confrontation of the foreigners’⁹⁸; however despite the physical affinity in the city, the cities are the places of social interaction, the public sphere is not well designed to enable the ‘differences’ to confront with each other.⁹⁹ In the case of Laz, I would suggest that the differentiation is rather ideological where the Laz themselves tend to secure their middle classness and privileged position in the eye of the state.

While, the ‘other’ of the Kurdish identity is usually considered to be the Turks, the ‘other’ of the Laz is not Turks, but Kurds. As the leading cultural/ethnic identity was articulated and politicized by the Kurds, either as a reason or the consequence of this announcement has highly marginalized them within the nation. Therefore the Laz were quite hesitant to expose themselves in the public sphere, due to the fear of being marginalized and losing their privileged status. Consequently, condemnation of the Kurds has been a convention in order to articulate one’s Lazness safely.

I find in my observations and interviews that the Kurds were portrayed as ‘miserable’, ‘separatist’, ‘hostile to the state’ and consequently ‘unreliable’ by the Laz. Here is an anecdote which I believe explains the clash of the two stereotypes in everyday practice. My mother once met with the wife of a friend of my father and they started chatting instantly.

⁹⁸ Sibel Demirtaş, Bülent Diken, İştâ B. Gözüaydın, “Mekan ve Ötekiler”, *Defter*, V. 28, Metis Yayıncılık, 1996, p. 38

⁹⁹ *ibid*, p. 40

-Mehmet Bey, told me that you are from Black Sea.

-Yes, actually we are Laz.

-Laz? *Estağfurullah!*

-There is nothing wrong with being Laz, I think. We are bilingual, we have a second language. But we are not like Kurds, not separatist, we don't kill anyone.

-We are Kurds.

When we come to the 2000s, the period of the proliferation of ethnic claims, the tension between the Laz and the Kurdish identity increased as much as the latter articulated their cultural rights legitimately. The more the Kurdish identity was becoming legitimate, the more tension the Laz felt for emphasizing their Turkishness and loyalty to the nation-state.

In one of the social media networks, *myspace.com*, someone who used '*Lazca*' as a nickname, initially tells how the Laz are Turkish in origin and how they are loyal while criticizing the separatists only because he does not want to be condemned as a separatist himself. However, he goes on sharing the Laz songs and writing comments in Laz language under the pictures from the 'homeland'.¹⁰⁰

Similarly, with regard to the news of some Laz who demanded broadcasting in Laz language from the state, there were tough discussions among the readers on the Internet whether they want the Laz TV broadcasting. A reader comment was as follows:

Nick Name: Alperen

Dear Friends,

¹⁰⁰ <http://tr.myspace.com/lazca>

Rize is the cement of Turkey. We are a loyal region. What is the nonsense of Lazca TV? Ok, the Laz language is already spoken but there can't be a separate TV. Do you consider yourself like the 'East'. Lazness is only a joke. WE ARE SON OF THE TURKS.¹⁰¹

Similarly, the Laz were expected to set an example for the whole nation in contrast with the 'unfavorable' Kurds. Despite their similarity with Kurds in terms of bilingualism and having a district culture, the Laz were praised for not being a 'demanding' ethnic group like Kurds. The deputy from the Nationalist Action Party (MHP), Münir Kutluata once told to the Peace and Democracy Party Deputies (BDP) referring to the "Laz who speak Laz but still demand neither education in Laz nor self autonomy".¹⁰² It paradoxically has turned into a joke about the Laz and Kurds.

When a Kurd and a Laz were sentenced to death penalty they were asked for their last wish. Then the Kurd asked to see his mother for the last time. When it came to the Laz, he said 'I wish the Kurd to not see his mother.'¹⁰³

In short, it is obvious that unless the cultural policies are revised in line with more freedom and fairness, there will be some sort of tension in society like the one between the Laz and the Kurdish.

¹⁰¹ "Alperen/ arkadaşlar rize türkiyenin çimentosu vatanına milletine başlı bir yöreyiz biz nedir lazca bir tv tamam lazca zaten bilen konuşuyor ama ayrıca tv olmaz siz kendinizi doğu ile birmi tutuyorsunuz lazlık sadece bir latife BİZ TÜRK OĞLU TÜRKÜZ." 24.02.2009 http://www.haber53.com/haber_detay.php?haber_id=28696

¹⁰² 3 November .2010 <http://www.turkhaber.eu/Guncel/Lazlar-Kurtler-Gibi-Degil-797.htm>

¹⁰³ "Bir Lazla bir Kürt birlikte idam sehpasına çıkarılır. Cellat, iki kurbanından önce Kürt'e son arzusunu sunar. Kürt, 'Anamı görmek isterim' der. Cellat, 'Kabul' deyip Laz'a döner; 'Senin son arzun nedir?' Laz cevaplar; 'Kürt, anasını görmesin.' Türker, Yıldırım, 'Kürt anasını görmesin'" Radikal Gazetesi, 06.04.2003, http://www.radikal.com.tr/ek_haber.php?ek=r2&haberno=2124

CHAPTER III:
CHALLENGING THE EXISTING REPRESENTATIONS OF LAZ FOR
INTRODUCING A NEW LAZ IDENTITY

In this chapter, I will reconsider the works of the Laz intellectuals as efforts to open a space for a new representation of their cultural identity by challenging the popular stereotypes. I believe that these works aimed at reconstructing the temporality and space of the Laz identity that was shaped by the processes that I elaborated in the first chapter.

The Replacement of Experience by Representation

Since the foundation of the republic in Turkey, as the cultural differences were reduced to regional differences; the language, music, dance, etc. were expected and represented to be in line with “Turkishness” according to cultural policies. For example, the Kurds were assumed to be speaking a South-Eastern Turkish accent, and similarly the Laz, the north-Eastern Turkish accent. Even when it was called the “Laz language” (*Lazca*) it was still supposed to be a ‘distorted’ accent of Turkish.

The widespread “Laz stereotype” has identified with the Black Sea region *via* popular cultural products and the media. This stereotype is still represented as macho, extremely naive or cunning, speaking a “funny” Turkish accent, dancing “*horon*” with *kemençe* improperly. Despite the apparent cultural differences, Lazness is defined within Turkishness and as a regional version of it.

When I was giving a short lecture about my research project to the Folklore Club of Boğaziçi University, I repeated my argument about the perception of the Laz as a

version of Turkishness, a Laz student told me a recent anecdote that confirms my argument. She was in a state office in Ardeşen and supposed to fill in a form. When it came to the question of nationality, she was unwilling to write ‘Turkish’, considering herself Laz.

-Why are you not writing ‘Turkish’?

- I am not Turkish!

- Are you Kurdish?

- No, I am Laz.

- Laz is counted as Turkish, you go ahead and write ‘Turkish!’

It would not be wrong to say that the Laz stereotype is commonly found to be a sympathetic one within the nation, particularly by the Turks, and therefore has positive connotations at first glance. Especially within the popular discourse, “the Turkishness of the Laz” has not been considered to be a controversial and debatable claim at all, until the last decade.

We can trace the ‘Laz’ stereotype back to the beginning of the nineteenth century in the Karagöz-Hacivat show.¹⁰⁴ As the characters of the Karagöz-Hacivat show consisted of the superficial representations of the Empire’s people, the Laz represented the Black Sea community. Metin And describes the Laz character as such: “Laz, who comes from the Black Sea coast, is either a boatman, woolbeater or tin smith. He has a strong Black Sea coast accent. He is very talkative and also speaks quickly. He takes approximately fifteen minutes just to say 'hello' and is very jittery. As he is usually so busy talking to himself, he cannot listen to other people or follow what they say and has

¹⁰⁴ S. Sokullu , *Türk Tiyatrosunda Komedyanın Evrimi*, Kültür Bakanlığı, Ankara, 1997

a habit of becoming angry in a very short time. Karagöz often has to forcibly close Laz's mouth in order to get a word in himself.”¹⁰⁵ The popular cultural products of plays and films continue the tradition, and their plots are still likely to include a man from the Black Sea coast as a minor figure. In these products, the Laz people are generally portrayed as superficial ‘funny’ characters representing their regional, folkloric motifs (accent, music, dance, etc.).

It is possible to find countless examples of the common Laz stereotype amongst the popular cultural products which continue the above mentioned tradition of Turkish theatre, cinema, TV and literature. However I would like to mention only a few among these.

For example, the ‘Vişne Bahçesu’ is said to be the Laz version of the Chekhov’s ‘Cherry Garden’ staged by Ferhan Şensoy in 1990s. Similarly the Laz Kapital¹⁰⁶, was supposed to be a humorous version of Das Kapital by Karl Marx written in ‘Laz’ accent. As “stereotyping reduces people to a few, simple, essential characteristics, which are represented as fixed by nature,”¹⁰⁷ the common point of those works is that the Laz character portrayed extremely superficially in terms of social background and reduced to a few folkloric elements like accent, music, dance etc. This character functions basically as a humorous spice added to the work.

¹⁰⁵ Metin And, *Karagöz Turkish Shadow Theatre*, Dost Yayınları, İstanbul, 1975, p. 67-75

¹⁰⁶ Yılmaz Okumuş, *Laz Kapital*, Epsilon Yayınevi, 2006

¹⁰⁷ Stuart Hall, *The Spectacle of the Other, Representation Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, Ed. Stuart Hall, The Open University, Sage Publications, 1997, p. 257

The name ‘Laz’¹⁰⁸ is commonly used as a joke to refer to awkward stupidity just as it is used for the Britons, Scots, etc. as a part of a humorous genre that circulates within almost all societies. The Laz jokes (*Laz Fıkraları*) are quite popular either told orally or written—and there are many Laz joke books.

As an extension of this stereotype, the ‘irrationality’ of the Laz is frequently displayed in media as if irrationality is actually the general, ‘natural’ characteristic of these people.¹⁰⁹ This obviously strengthens the stereotype and treats it as ‘real’.

Meeker calls attention to the resemblance of the Pontic Greeks’ stereotype in Greece. “The Pontic Greeks are called Laz (Lazoi) by other Greeks, just as Black Sea Turks are called Laz by other Turks, and the term carries the same mildly derogatory meaning in Greek that it carries in Turkish. Like the Black Sea Turks, the Pontic Greeks are famous for what have been identified as Caucasian characteristics-blood feuds, interest in and dependence on weapons, sensitivity to questions of honor, and a more careful separation of men and women in public life. Other Greeks regard them as being more primitive, unsophisticated and their accent¹¹⁰ is ridiculed, just as the accent of the Black Sea Turks is ridiculed by other Turks.”¹¹¹

¹⁰⁸ Once, in restaurant, our Laz delivery person couldn’t find the delivery address. When he came back to the restaurant, the customer called and told off ‘Are you Laz!’ When he received the confirmation, he said ‘*Etağfurullah!*’

¹⁰⁹ Nurettin İğci (Eds.) *Medyatik Temel Karadeniz’den Fıkra Ötesi Gerçekler*, Era Yayıncılık , İstanbul, 2002

¹¹⁰ For the narrative of the discrimination that the Pontic Greek originated migrants were subjected to particularly related with the ‘accent’ see: Arzu Öztürkmen, “Remembering Conflicts in a Black Sea Town: A Multi-sited Ethnography of Memory”, *New Perspectives on Turkey*, V. 34, Spring 2006, p. 109

¹¹¹ Michael E. Meeker, *The Black Sea Turks: Some Aspects of Their Ethnic and Cultural Background*, *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 2, No. 4, October, Cambridge University Press, 1971, p. 332-333

One of the researchers on the Laz culture, Ildiko Beller Hann says that “the term ‘Laz’ also camouflages the multicultural structure of the Black Sea region. Many people, particularly in the texts, are aware of this stereotype: energetic, brave, savage, cruel to the women but care about children’s education. This common stereotype leaves very little space (in terms of representation) for the ones in the east (Laz, Hemşin, Georgian.)”¹¹²

What I would like to emphasize here is the ways that these stereotypes are consumed by the Laz themselves. While the political correctness is taken for granted at the national level, despite the frustration about their mis-representations, the Laz do not actually find these that offensive as far as I could observe. Perhaps, despite the negative aspects, it is tolerated and internalized because in the total it has positive connotations associated with being practical, brave and patriotic which place the Laz on the ‘safe’ side of the nation.

Stuart Hall’s argument about stereotypes shows how a stereotype can be simultaneously both negative and positive: “People who are in any way significantly different from the majority- ‘them’ rather than ‘us’ –are frequently exposed to binary form of representation. They seem to be represented sharply opposed; polarized, binary extremes-good/bad, civilized/primitive, ugly/excessively attractive, repelling-because-different/compelling-because-strange-and-exotic. And they are often required to be both things at the same time!”¹¹³

¹¹² Ildiko Beller Hann, *Doğu Karadeniz’de Efsane Tarih ve Kültür*, Trans. Ali İhsan Aksamaz , Çivi Yazıları Yayınevi , İstanbul, 1999, p 23

¹¹³ Stuart Hall, *The Spectacle of the Other, Representation Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, Ed. Stuart Hall, The Open University, Sage Publications, 1997, p. 229

Hall also says that “stereotypes get hold of the few ‘simple, vivid, memorable, easily grasped and widely recognized’ characteristics about a person, reduce everything about the person to those traits, exaggerate and simplify them, and fix them without change or development eternity. So the first point is- stereotyping reduces, essentializes, naturalizes and fixes ‘difference’”.¹¹⁴

From this respect, I would suggest that, the Laz stereotype reduces the Laz to a couple of exaggerated characteristics and fixing them so that the opportunity for Laz to express and represent themselves is almost closed off. As the stereotype objectifies the Laz, it does not leave them any chance to open up any space to their ‘experience’.

Thus, despite the immense productions referring to ‘Laz’, there have been only a few works in the popular culture, only in the 2000s that the Laz community was able to identify with themselves. For example it was in 2003 that a Laz song appeared on the TV¹¹⁵ and surprisingly in 2010 a dialogue in Laz took place on a movie screen.¹¹⁶

Under these conditions, the Laz consciously or unconsciously camouflaged their Lazness in order to be taken seriously and to be unmarked especially when migrating to the metropolises. That is to say, in order to be an acceptable subject in everyday life, Lazness has to be abandoned. I would like to tell two particular anecdotes that I hope expresses this attitude.

Once me, my cousin and her friends were coming back from the concert of Empula. As we were all Laz and enjoyed the music and *horon* during the concert we

¹¹⁴ Stuart Hall, 1997, p. 258

¹¹⁵ Gülbeyaz, Kanal D, 2002

¹¹⁶ Cem Yılmaz was playing the Laz, speaking Laz, however still a ‘crazy’ character in ‘Av Mevsimi’ by Yavuz Turgul.

were speaking with our Laz accent unconsciously without feeling any stress of adjusting it to the ‘Istanbul Turkish accent’. When we started speaking about politics, my cousin’s friend’s accent unconsciously changed to ‘Istanbul Turkish’.

In the second case, it was the moment I caught myself in a very similar position. I was then talking to a childhood friend on the phone, again in a similar relaxed mood, when I started talking about the subject that I was working on a research project, she found the change in my ‘adjusted’ accent strange.

Those moments helped me realize that Turkish is the language of the formal life, while the Laz (or its extension as the accent) language is the language of the informal/intimate, etc. This division inevitably enables the Laz (and probably other minority groups) to have not only two languages, but also two accents.

I realized that I had a marked accent when my friends told me that my accent changes instantly as soon as I get home or meet with my family and Laz friends. In addition to that, I frequently receive the comment of ‘Have you ever lived abroad?’ in a formal conversation (especially work interviews). Apparently, my accent leaks from my unconscious efforts to hide it. And as I give the impression of a middle class, educated, ‘modern’ woman, people cannot recognize my Laz accent which is more likely to be attached to villagers, etc. I can tell that this is the fate of all ethnic languages spoken in Turkey as I have heard similar incidents from my Kurdish friends.

The Laz language was so much marked with ‘apolitical’ and ‘light’ connotations, it is not taken seriously by the state even if the content is highly antagonistic. The band *Zuğışı Berepe* was suffering and at the same time enjoying this kind of perception of the Laz language:

In the first album of *Zuğışı Berepe*, “Va Mişkunan”, we had lyrics like ‘stand up, come together, go and occupy the factories for the sake of freedom, love and revolution’. Actually, I was expecting a response from the ‘rival team’ but it didn’t happen. I guess they listened to our lyrics like a Laz joke”¹¹⁷

Obviously not just because of this reason but also the historical positions of the Laz may also contribute to this sort of indifference by the state.

Stereotyping is what Foucault called a ‘power/knowledge’ sort of game. It classifies people according to a norm and constructs the excluded as ‘other’. The establishment of normalcy through social norms and stereotypes is one aspect of the habit of ruling groups to attempt to fashion the whole of society according to their own world view, value system, sensibility and ideology.¹¹⁸

Power has to be understood here, not only in terms of economic exploitation and physical coercion, but also in broader cultural or symbolic terms, including the power to represent someone or something in a certain way-within a certain ‘regime of representation’. It includes the exercise of symbolic power through representational practices. Stereotyping is a key element in this exercise of symbolic violence.¹¹⁹

Therefore we can interpret the existence of the stereotypes as a threat from the state to the citizens to adjust themselves according to the acceptable citizens’ norms; otherwise the marking and exclusion would be inevitable.

¹¹⁷ “*Zuğışı Berepe*’nin ilk albümü *Vamişkunan*’da şöyle şarkı sözlerimiz vardı: ‘Ayağa kalkın, yan yana gelin, gidin fabrikaları işgal edin, özgürlük, aşk ve devrim için.’ Doğrusu bu sözlere ‘rakip takım’dan tepki bekliyordum. Olmadı. Bizim şarkı sözlerini Laz fıkrası gibi dinlediler galiba.” Interview with Kazım Koyuncu, “N3aşa Exti” Roll, V. 99, July, 2005

¹¹⁸ Stuart Hall, *The Spectacle of the Other, Representation Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, Ed. Stuart Hall, The Open University, Sage Publications, 1997, p. 259

¹¹⁹ Stuart Hall, 1997, p. 259

The Laz Cultural Movement: Reconstructing the Temporal and Spatial Dimensions of the Laz Identity

When we come to the end of the twentieth century we see that the effects of globalization which simplify the circulation of information about the history, origins, and cultures as well as the capital and labour predominantly alter the conventional nationalist discourse and promote instead, multiculturalism in Turkey, as in many other contexts around the world. As a consequence of the decline in the legitimacy of monolithic cultural policies of the nation states, the persistence of ethnic minorities as indicative of backwardness and anti-modernism has gradually lost considerable ground.

Ferguson and Gupta claim that, owing to globalization, the conventional governmental form changed and consequently “new forms of transnational connection are increasingly enabling “local” actors to challenge the state’s well-established claims to encompassment and vertical superiority in unexpected ways (...)”.¹²⁰

Furthermore, it can even be argued that some are now glorifying ethnic-pluralism as an indicator of modernity and democracy. Starting from 1990s, several controversial metaphors arose which are either glorifying or criticizing the multicultural structure of Turkey such as mosaics, *ebru*, marble (metaphor of the Nationalist Movement Party), etc. Those metaphors can be interpreted as attempts to re-define the nation with a new concept: spontaneously recognizing the multicultural structure while perpetuating the Turkishness through new means. However, as a result of the Kurdish Political

¹²⁰ James Ferguson; Akhil Gupta, *Spatializing States: Toward an Ethnography of Neoliberal Governmentality*, *Anthropologies of Modernity, Foucault, Governmentality, and Life Politics*, Edited by: Jonathan Xavier Inda, University of California, Santa Barbara, 2005, p.114

Movement revitalizing in 1980s, having social, cultural and economic roots historically, the 1990s were still tense for discussing the notion of ‘multiculturalism’.

When we come to the 2000s, the notion of multiculturalism gets rather reified with the relatively liberal policies of the Justice and Development Party (*AKP*).¹²¹ Responding to the changing demographics, economic geography as well as the peoples’ democratic aspirations, the party has positioned itself as pro-market and pro-European.¹²² The reformist *AKP* governments initiated several courageous openings (dubbed “democratic opening” by the government) to mend relations with and address the current and historical problems of groups such as the Alevis, Armenians, the Roman community and Kurds.¹²³ Despite the possibility of forging a more pluralistic democracy by these reformist elites¹²⁴, the changes in the hegemonic discourse had not yet been supported by persistent changes in the legal framework.

I believe that the *AKP* elites’ understanding of ‘modernity’ and ‘tradition’ played an important role in this dramatic shift towards the notion of multiculturalism in a short period of time. Rabasa and Larrabee say that, “while the *AKP* has Islamic roots, it enjoys broad based political support that transcends religious, class, and regional differences. Its widespread social networks and efficient party machine, with close ties to local constituencies, have enabled it to gain strong support among the poor and the marginalized—many of whom are pious and socially conservative—who make up a

¹²¹ *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*

¹²² Soli Ozel, “Turkey's Quest to Modernise Remains on Track” *Financial Times*, 25 July 2007

¹²³ Murat Somer, “Does It Take Democrats to Democratize? Lessons From Islamic and Secular Elite Values in Turkey”, *Comparative Political Studies*, 2011 V. 44: 511, p. 533-534

¹²⁴ *ibid*, p.514

growing portion of Turkey's urban population. At the same time, its liberal, free-market economic policies attract the provincial entrepreneurial classes in Anatolia—the so-called “Anatolian tigers”—which are socially conservative but integrated into the global economy.”¹²⁵

In her early article in 1997, Göle says that ‘the very project of modernization, based on external references, alien to local customs and traditions, has perverted the relationship between the secular elites and the people. Islamism, both in its ideological formulations and sociological practices, has created new hybridizations between tradition and modernity, religion and secularism, community and religion. Islamization, therefore, can be seen as a counter-attack against the principles of the Kemalist project of modernization and the vested interests of the Westernized elites.’¹²⁶ Like the previous elites, their social status is defined not only by economic power, but by cultural capital.

The way the *türban* (headscarf) is represented as a part of the modern life instead of its former ‘traditional’ context is a good example of this change.¹²⁷ What I would like to emphasize here is that, the power of *AKP* enabled certain people to feel comfortable with their traditional values and adapt those values to the modern life. This inevitably disturbed the Republican elites who were represented as the ‘conveyers’ of the modernity and considered as the ‘good citizens’ (*makbul vatandaşlar*) so far. In short, my purpose is to demonstrate that this conceptual change enabled people to express their

¹²⁵ Angel Rabasa and F. Stephen Larrabee, *The Rise of Political Islam in Turkey*, National Defense Research Institute, RAND Corporation, 2008, p. 97

¹²⁶ Nilüfer Göle, Secularism and Islamism in Turkey: The Making of Elites and Counter-Elites, *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 51, No. 1, Winter, 1997 pp. 46-58

¹²⁷ Baris Kiliçbay and Mutlu Binark, “Consumer Culture, Islam and the Politics of Lifestyle : Fashion Contemporary Turkey, *European Journal of Communication*, V. 17, 2002, p. 495

ethnic, cultural origins without being apologetic compared with earlier times. However, this is a relative freedom compared with the past and some ethnic and religious groups such as the Kurds and Alevis are still having significant problems of expression compared to the others.

Despite the recent challenges, the hierarchical scaling between the ‘traditional’ and the ‘modern’ is still considerably maintained by the people of Turkey, the following example might be interesting: On the TV show ‘*Yemekteyiz*’¹²⁸ shot in Rize, one of the local contestants started her preparation from her village collecting the ingredients while orientalizing the village life wearing local costume and cooking particularly from local cuisine and stressing her strong accent. Then when the preparations finished and it was time to serve, she changed her costume to a ‘modern style’ and tracked her accent instantly to a ‘decent’ mode. On top of that she proudly expressed that “I demonstrated how a Black Sea girl could be ‘modern’ appropriately....modernism is not in my appearance but in my heart, I am natural.”¹²⁹

Cultural revitalization movements among various ethnic groups took place everywhere in the world in the last hundred years or so have led to self-conscious efforts to preserve their cultural heritage. However, we should take into consideration that every movement has its own historical context. In the next step, I will focus on the process of the Laz Cultural Movement. However, since it should not be considered as a homogeneous movement I will attempt to explore the conflicts and controversial notions within it. The definition of ‘Laz Cultural Movement’ is not mine, but employed by those

¹²⁸ It is contest where contestants perform their cooking skills and represent their local cuisine.

¹²⁹ “*Karadeniz kızının çok güzel modern olabileceğini gösterdim. (...) Modernlik benim için beynimde, görünümümde değil. Ben doğalım.*” *Yemekteyiz*, 18 May 2009, Show TV

Laz intellectuals who practically contributed, more or less, to the revitalization of the Laz culture.

Stuart Hall says, “identity is such a concept-operating ‘under erasure’ in the interval between reversal and emergence; an idea which cannot be thought in the old way, but without which certain key questions cannot be thought at all”.¹³⁰ I can certainly say that the Laz Cultural Movement emerged in such conditions when the Laz language as well as other cultural characteristics are said to be ‘in dissolution’ due to several reasons I attempted to explain above.

Since 1990s, the above mentioned “Laz stereotype” has been increasingly contested¹³¹ and challenged through some performances in music, dance, theatre, publications and the Internet in particular. The main motivation has been to expose Lazness in the public sphere where more or less almost all Laz experienced Lazness through this ‘invisibility’ and incommunicability due to the existence of the Laz stereotype. During the formal or informal interviews I conducted with the Laz people since 2002,¹³² I met many people who complained about the difficulty of expressing even the existence of the Laz language.

This invisibility should not be considered as having been completely detrimental for the Laz. On the contrary, it has sometimes enabled them to be as free as an invisible

¹³⁰ Stuart Hall, “Who Needs ‘Identity?’” in *Questions of Cultural Identity*, eds. Stuart Hall, Paul du Gay, Sage Publications: London, 1998, p.2 Cited in Melissa Bilal, “*The Lost Lullaby and Other Stories About Being an Armenian in Turkey*”, Unpublished MA Thesis, Sociology Department, Boğaziçi University, 2004, p.19

¹³¹ Selma Koçiva, “*Laz Fıkralarıyla Üstümüze Gelenler*”, *Özgür Politika*, 11 October 1998

¹³² My graduation research project for the sociology department was about “Reading the Urbanization Experiences of the Laz through the ‘Laz’ jokes”. (Nilüfer Taşkın, “*Laz Fıkraları ve Lazların Kentleşme Süreci*”, Undergraduate Thesis, Sociology Department, University of Mimar Sinan, İstanbul, 2003)

man is free of charge of his faults. For example, I believe that this invisibility protected them from being subjected to violence from either the society or the state.

Despite the existence of diverse and even rival discourses, the common motivation of these struggles was to take out Lazness out of the ‘Laz’ stereotype, giving back the honour of the Laz culture to itself, exposing the Laz identity in the public sphere, and unmarking or re-marking the Laz identity. To put it other words, whatever they did, those intellectuals intended to bring the Laz culture from the past to the present time, and bring it to the center of the city from the village. As the representations of ‘cultures’ have conventionally been detached from their historicity and rather represented as ‘dead’ in Turkey, these attempts aimed at presenting and enabling the Laz identity as a ‘living’ entity without being marked. It would be useful to mention Simon Frith here as he says: “an identity is always already an ideal, what we would like to be, not what we are.”¹³³

I find significant to elaborate on the concept of ‘identity’ here. Meltem Ahıska, defines a difference between ‘self’ and ‘identity’ and refers to the concept of ‘identity’ as a representation of the ‘self’¹³⁴ which is a ‘social construction’ that is shaped in the need.¹³⁵ Secondly, she says when constructing the identity, the individual rather ignores the contradictory or conflicting aspects of the self and pretends as if it is

¹³³ Simon Frith, “Music and Identity”, in *Questions of Cultural Identity*, edited by Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay, Sage Publications, London, 1998, p.123

¹³⁴ Meltem Ahıska, Kimlik Kavramı Üstüne Fragmanlar, *Defter*, V. 27, Metis Yayıncılık, İstanbul. 1996, p. 16

¹³⁵ *ibid*, p. 30

homogeneous.¹³⁶ Thus, it would not be wrong if we say that the Laz intellectuals intend to reconstruct the ‘Laz identity’ by freeing it from its conventional context which has objectified them so far. And in order to do so, they ignore the contradicting aspects of their selves and rather pretend as if Lazness is a monolithic essence.

Stokes suggests that “subcultures borrow from the dominant culture, inflecting and inverting its signs to create a bricolage in which signs of the dominant culture are ‘there’ and just recognizable as such, but constituting a quite different, subversive whole.”¹³⁷ The Laz intellectuals were to do so indeed, constructing particularly the notions of ‘history’, ‘culture’, ‘language’, etc. towards the Turkish nation-states’ but in a parallel manner. Therefore, I will attempt to analyze the actors, the institutions and the discourses around the Movement with those concepts.

At this point, I would like to note that I assume a sort of differentiation between the actors of the Movement and the intended consumers of their productions as ‘Laz people’. This is because I see a difference in the construction of Laz identity for both sides. First of all, while the intellectuals define Lazness with the concept of ‘difference’, the Laz people do it with ‘similarity’ with the Turkish nation. Secondly, the intellectuals consider the Laz as a minority¹³⁸ who have suffered from assimilation policies of the nation state(s)¹³⁹ while the latter deny any implication of oppression or pacification.

¹³⁶ *ibid*, p. 15; p. 22

¹³⁷ Martin Stokes, “Introduction”, *Ethnicity, Identity and Music: The Musical Construction of Place*, Martin Stokes (Ed), Oxford/NY: Berg, 1994, p.19

¹³⁸ The term "minority" here refers to a socially subordinate ethnic group.

¹³⁹ Not only the Turkish state but also there are references of Soviet Russia because of the Laz population in Georgia.

However, the distance between the two groups has been closing since the beginning of 1990s to eventually meet at the same point: enjoying music and dance in the public sphere in the 2000s as I will elaborate in the third chapter.

History: Glorifying the Golden Age of Colchis

Probably, one of the common points of all the revitalization movements is reconstructing ‘their history’ as a response to the misrepresentations of the official nationalist history. As it was the case for the Laz intellectuals, the historical roots of the Laz were ‘discovered’ or ‘invented’. I should note that, by using the terms of ‘discovery’ or ‘invention’, I do not intend to say that these historical references are insubstantial, while it is not the concern of this thesis. Rather, I am interested to analyze how this concept is functionalized to reconstruct the Laz identity. In this context, I accept the notion of ‘history’ as an ideological apparatus serving to the various power designs which makes it possible for the intellectuals to call ‘history’ to the service of construction of the new Laz identity.

In 1992, a book titled as “History of Lazis”¹⁴⁰ was published which was quite popular among the Laz and sparked off some hot debates about the historical roots of Laz which were said to migrate from the Central Asia as well as other ethnic groups of Anatolia according to the official history thesis.¹⁴¹ Referring to the Colchis civilization as the roots of the Laz was signifying the Caucasian origin instead of Central Asia. This

¹⁴⁰Muhammed Vanilişi and Ali Tandiliva, *Lazların Tarihi*, İstanbul: Ant Yayınları, 1992

¹⁴¹ M. Fahrettin Kırzioğlu, “Lazlar/Çanarlar”, *Türk Tarih Kongresi VII*, 1. Volume, 1972, p. 420-45

thesis persuaded some Laz who were already enthusiastic about differentiating themselves from Turks. However, the book's claim that Laz were from the Georgian origin had lost its persuasiveness among the Laz intellectuals lately.

The frequent reference to Colchis was meant to say to the Laz people that 'you are not rootless. On the contrary, you were, once upon a time, part of a civilization that ruled a wide geography'. The name Colchis was turned to be a symbol, for example, giving name to a couple of firms.¹⁴²

The history of the Laz' was written many times from more or less a similar perspective since 1992 by different writers.¹⁴³ When we talk about history, we should mention *Ogni* here, a highly influential magazine launched in 1993.¹⁴⁴ The magazine was mostly in Turkish and there was the introduction of the Laz alphabet in Latin characters and some sample essays mainly about Laz culture.

Moreover, the notion of 'history' was extremely important for the contributors of *Ogni*. They were basically "enlightening" the people about "their history", not simple history but History of the Golden Age of Laz when they were presumably a dominant power in the Eastern Black Sea and Caucasia during the Colheti civilization. Not only the ancient times, but through a careful reading of *Ogni*, one was able to learn about the recent history of Laz institutions like *Laz Tekamül-ü Milli Cemiyeti*.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴² Colchis Music Production Company by Birol Topalođu and Colchis *İletişim* by Funda Özyurt.

¹⁴³ Ali İhsan Aksamaz, 1997, 2000; Ildiko Beller Hann, 1999; Meeker, 1971; Ascherson, 2001; M . Recai Özgün, 1996

¹⁴⁴ *Ogni* means listen, understand in Laz. *Ogni*, Sifteri Yayıncılık, 1992, Istanbul.

¹⁴⁵ Tank Zafer Tunaya, 'Laz Tekamül-ü Milli Cemiyeti', *Ogni*, V.1, 1993

Michael-Rolph Trouillot argues that “the production of historical narratives involves the uneven contribution of competing groups and individuals who have uneven access to the means for such production.”¹⁴⁶ And continues, “not only the socio-historical processes themselves are involved with struggles, but the production of knowledge is also an arena of constant struggle.”¹⁴⁷

In contrast with the intellectuals, the Laz people were not that concerned with where they came from, instead, the sense of ‘us’ was apparently enough for them.¹⁴⁸ Moreover, in the public memory, the matter of history was more personal and complicated than what the ‘glorious ancient history’ discourse would say. People were able to trace their ancestors’ genealogy only a few generations earlier. Moreover, they were more likely to identify themselves with the Black Sea rather than the Caucasus. Besides, majority of the Laz people consider themselves as part of Turkish community by inventing the paradoxical term ‘Laz Turks’ even when they recognize a cultural differentiation to a certain extent.

Ogni brought about a considerable synergy to those educated, middle class Laz, mostly men who were conscious about reconstructing the ‘Laz identity’. Not only among Laz, but there was also an interaction with other ethnic groups in that respect, particularly the Caucasians of Turkey. Even though the Movement was influenced significantly from the Kurdish Movement, the intellectuals “have been careful not to

¹⁴⁶ Michael-Rolph Trouillot, “Preface”, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*, Beacon Press, 1995, p. Xix. Cited in Melissa Bilal, “*The Lost Lullaby and Other Stories About Being an Armenian in Turkey*”, Unpublished MA Thesis, Sociology Department, Boğaziçi University, 2004, p. 127

¹⁴⁷ *ibid*, p.127

¹⁴⁸ Neal Ascherson, *Karadeniz*, İş Bankası Yayınları, 2001, İstanbul, p. 254

make any claims that might be interpreted as claims for political separatism, but have urged only that action be taken to defend *Lazuri* (Laz language) and Laz culture more generally”.¹⁴⁹ Moreover, the affiliation with the Kurds might have marginalized the Movement implying ‘separatist intentions’.

Ogni was taken to the court by the claim of having separatist intentions anyway. While the case terrorized most of the Laz readers, it drew the attention of some leftist groups. Despite the acquittal, the magazine had to be closed after the sixth edition due to various reasons.

In the following years some other books and magazines were published such as *Mjora*¹⁵⁰ and *Skani Nena*¹⁵¹ by the same circles. Even though the writings in the following publications were employing similar concepts, they were not as influential as *Ogni*. As language was one of the prominent concerns of the contributors’ of *Ogni*, one would also find some Laz cultural activists from recent history who were consequently punished by the Ottoman and Soviet Russian forces.¹⁵²

In short, for the Laz intellectuals, ‘their glorious history’ is appropriated to make it possible for the Laz people to identify with their own ethnic origins. This can also be interpreted as a typical mechanism employed by the nationalism.

¹⁴⁹ Chris Hann and Ildiko Beller Hann “Markets, Morality and Modernity in North-East Turkey” in *Border Identities: Nation and State at International Frontiers*, Cambridge University Press, Thomas M. Wilson, Hastings Donnan (Eds.), 1998, p. 257

¹⁵⁰ *Mjora*, Çiviyazıları, İstanbul, 2000

¹⁵¹ The publication of the Laz Culture Association, in İstanbul, 2009

¹⁵² Mehmedali Barış Beşli, “Tarihe Karşı Kısa Bir Tarih”, *Mjora*, 2 , Çivi Yazıları, 2000, p.16

The ‘Loss’ of the Language

When we look at the related productions as a whole, we can easily grasp the notion of ‘loss of the Laz language’. The language has been considered as being almost the most important signifier of the Laz. If to make the Laz language ‘visible’ in the public sphere was the first task, to remove the pejorative connotations around it was the second. If they manage to transform the self-perception of the Laz people, they believed, they could incite the people to speak and revitalize their language.

The band *Zuğışı Berepe* was one of the significant actors who managed to introduce the Laz language to a group of educated youth living in the urban areas in 1993. By composing and singing in Laz language –which was previously regarded as ‘the villagers’ language in a ‘modern’ musical genre, ‘rock’, was a successful mission of reconstructing the temporal and spatial aspects of the Laz identity. Kazım Koyuncu’s self-account was also in this direction:

I think, the way *Zuğışı Berepe* used the Laz language has been the most important action in order to revitalize the language. Because the Laz language had to urbanize itself anyway.¹⁵³

However, the change in the album covers of *Zuğışı Berepe* signifies a sort of confusion in this respect. For example I interpret the first album’s cover, a picture of an old woman, as a ‘conveyor of the Laz language’ rather pessimistic and still embedding the Laz identity in the past. However the second album cover was rather ‘modern’ in

¹⁵³ “*Zuğışı Berepe*’nin Lazca’yı kullanma biçimi bence Lazca’ya yapılan ve Lazca’nın yaşatılması doğrultusunda yapılan en önemli eylem olduğunu düşünüyorum. Çünkü Lazca’nın bir şekilde kentleşmesi gerekiyordu.” Interview with Kazım Koyuncu on Umut Radyo in Pazar (Rize). 3 February 2004 (Date uncertain)

terms of its graphic design which orients to the present and is more optimistic about the ‘future’.

Through their performances, many people found out that such a language as Laz existed. Even though they arranged some traditional Laz songs, most of their repertoire consisted of their own compositions about love, revolution and Lazness itself. Not only the music but also the band was in a hybrid form as only Kazım Koyuncu and Memedali Barış Beşli were the Laz among its other Turkish and Kurdish members. Their music was considerably influential on the Laz youth some of whom had later involved in similar performances.¹⁵⁴

For them, their music was not for fun, but a political act, a request for recognition of the Laz language. In their speeches on the stage, they explicitly expressed their identities and their purposes.¹⁵⁵ Moreover, they regarded themselves as Laz activists because for them the most important part of their culture was their language, which was legally forbidden until about a decade ago. The musicologist and musician Ayşenur Kolivar emphasizes the same argument:

What one could find in their music is not the traditional culture or not even the present culture in the traditional geography. Instead, what is expressed is the migrant Laz culture of the new generation of young immigrants in metropolitan cities, who dislike many aspects of their own tradition except their language and dance. The distinction between Laz music and music in Laz language expresses the cultural distinction of the migrants from the traditional one. The identity they adopt is not the traditional Laz culture living in the villages. Instead, they tried to shape a

¹⁵⁴ Both Birol Topaloğlu and Erdal Bayrakroğlu mentioned about this influence during their interviews.

¹⁵⁵ Ayşenur Kolivar, “Kentli Bir Yerel Kimlik Temsili Olarak Karadeniz Rock, *Müzikte Temsil ve Müziksel Temsil II Sempozyumu*” 20 October 2010

modern, urban Laz identity for mass of Laz migrants living in big cities.¹⁵⁶

In 1998, two young Laz prepared a 9000 word Laz-Turkish dictionary. This dictionary was a concrete evidence of the Laz language as well as culture, for those who find it deficient. Neither İsmail Avcı nor Hasan Uzunhasanoğlu were linguists but only amateur researchers who were passionate about their language. Their effort did not only aim at exposing the Laz language but also opening more room for communication among different dialects. This was one of the efforts to “imagine”¹⁵⁷ the Laz community. Informed by Benedict Anderson’s point of view, I suggest that the dictionary enabled the Laz people to perceive Lazness as an abstract category transcending their locality.

Despite the controversy about the standardization (which dialect and alphabet to be taken as standard?), the general opinion is that the survival of the Laz language depends on literacy. While there have been several efforts to improve the written forms of the Laz language, the writing in Laz is not still very widespread among the Laz. Not only book and magazines but also the web sites are the popular spheres of these discussions on language.

Even though there have been hot debates on mother language education/education in mother language particularly associated with the Kurdish community, the subject is rather silenced within the Laz community. Therefore the demand of some Laz intellectuals from the state to provide Laz language education remains marginal. Besides, the education in Laz language even exceeds the visions of

¹⁵⁶ Ayşenur Kolivar, 20 October 2010

¹⁵⁷ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities : Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London ; New York: Verso, 1991

the intellectuals. On the other hand, despite the frequent urge for revitalizing the language, most of those declarations were made in Turkish.

Besides writing in and about their language, some intellectuals are actively performing the language in their everyday lives. For example, they insistently speak Laz with their children¹⁵⁸, give them name in Laz, hire Laz speaking babysitters from Georgia. Meanwhile, using Laz words for firm names have become popular either in the city or in the rural within the public.

Constructing the Laz Culture

Jean-François Bayart says, “in its political ambivalence the formation of imagined cultural communities has been one of the most important ideological manifestations of globalization since the nineteenth century.”¹⁵⁹ And “from one space or historical landscape to another the intersection of the processes of inventing tradition, which has been constitutive of the general movement of globalization for more than a century, remind us that there is no culture that is not created, and that this creation is usually recent.”¹⁶⁰

In this respect, my main concern is how the fragments of a more or less phantasmal past were instrumentalized in the service of reconstructing the ‘Laz identity’.

¹⁵⁸ One of those children of 5 was objecting to be speaking in Laz saying ‘children can’t be Laz, I will be Laz when I grow up!’

¹⁵⁹ Jean-François Bayart, *The Illusion of Cultural Identity*, University of Chicago Press (Co-published with C. Hurst & Co.), 2005, p.40

¹⁶⁰ *ibid*, p.59

At this point I come across with the fact that those fragments were almost ‘responses’ to the Laz stereotype. I mean, the elements that the intellectuals dwell on are by majority the ones associated with the stereotypes. That is to say ‘we are not like that, but we are like this’. Therefore language, music and dance become significant facts of the Laz identity.

At this point I would like to mention the effect of the opening of the Georgian border in 1988. Chris and Ildiko Beller Hann say, “we found no evidence that the opening of the border had created any new sense of cultural distinctiveness and a related ethnic consciousness, either among Laz or among any other group”¹⁶¹. In contrast to their observation, I argue that, by the opening of the border, the Laz and especially the Laz intellectuals were able to imagine Lazness as an identity crossing the national borders. Furthermore, the visits beyond the border were providing the intellectuals means to discover “the cultural roots” that they assumed to have vanished. Thus, I claim that from celebrating an ancient Colchis festival Colkhoba¹⁶² to compiling tunes¹⁶³, from tracing the memories and heritage of Hasan Helimişi¹⁶⁴ to researching historical archives, opening of the border has been highly influential on the Laz intellectuals.

¹⁶¹ Chris Hann and Ildiko Beller Hann “Markets, Morality and Modernity in North-East Turkey” in *Border Identities: Nation and State at International Frontiers*, Cambridge University Press, Thomas M. Wilson, Hastings Donnan (Eds.), 1998, p. 257-58

¹⁶² Mathijs Pelkmans, *Defending the Border: Identity, Religion and Modernity in the Republic of Georgia*, New York: Cornell University Press, 2006, p. 61

¹⁶³ Both Birol Topaloğlu and Kazım Koyuncu visited Georgia and collected some of their songs for their albums.

¹⁶⁴ Hasan Helimişi (1907-1976) is known as the creator and leading exponent of modern Laz poetry and painting. Many of the artist's works were lost when he left for the USSR in 1932 and during his exile. He made voice recordings of all his remaining works in the Laz language and his paintings are kept in the archives of the Batum Museum. “Death of the Poet”, 2009, Director: Elif Ergezen

In 1992, a young Laz student, İsmail Avcı, who came to Istanbul for his computer-training played a crucial role in the Laz Cultural Movement. During his education, longing for his hometown and passionate about *horon*, Avcı decided to set up a *horon* group in the folklore club at Marmara University.¹⁶⁵ The *horon* dance from the Trabzon region played with the *kemençe*¹⁶⁶ is already recognized through the national education, folklore contests, and popular shows.¹⁶⁷ The *horon* from Laz and Hemşin region accompanied by the *tulum*¹⁶⁸ was however, not recognized at all at that time. Their first goal was to find young Laz people around university campuses throughout Istanbul to dance *horon*. They were successful indeed—they founded not only a *horon* group but gave birth to the eventual actors of the Laz Cultural Movement.

Their rehearsals turned out to be a spectacular show which attracted the students around who were not familiar with this particular dance.¹⁶⁹ The sense of dancing for an audience must have motivated them because they decided to perform for a show in the

¹⁶⁵ The interview with İsmail Avcı, from the archive of BGST(Boğaziçi Gösteri Sanatları Topluluğu) 2009.

¹⁶⁶ The *kemençe* is a musical instrument which is a bottle-shaped lute with three strings, closely related to the Pontic lyra found in the Black Sea region of Turkey. It is played in the downright position, either by resting it on the knee when sitting, or held in front of the player when standing.

¹⁶⁷ *Horon* part was the most glamorous one in the Sultans of the Dance. The effect of the show was to be proud of being Turk though at the end and consequently *horon* was the most spectacular thus, flattering in terms of national proud. (Dehmen, 2003)

¹⁶⁸ The *tulum* (*guda* in Laz) is a wind type musical instrument, a form of bagpipe that is droneless with two parallel chanters, usually played by the Laz, Hemşin people in Turkey. *Tulum* is generally made from lamb or kid skin which consists of three parts with leather section, ‘*nav*’ and mouth piece. The air is stored in the leather section and is let into the *nav* section by pressing the bag under the arm. *Nav* is the part where the melody is played.

¹⁶⁹ From the interview with Mine Kalaycı in May 2010, from the relevant *horon* group then. She later performed as a vocalist for Birol Topaloğlu and Kazım Koyuncu an done of the members of my band *Dalepe Nena*.

school. However, the university administration did not allow them to perform for ‘political reasons’.¹⁷⁰ It would be speculative to claim that the *horon* itself was considered to be ‘politically unfavorable’ but the banning of the show was real.

The group carried on dancing with changing cadres (even I participated in it for a while) in different places including such hometown associations as the Pazar Hometown Association. The group performed in concerts, hometown associations’ parties, etc. However, it was most spectacular and fun when performed not on the stage but at a public space such as, Taksim square or Kadıköy pier. It seemed as if the more inconvenient was the place the more it was passionate to perform. It was obviously a demonstration for demanding a public recognition for *horon* and consequently Lazness. In the following years, the *horon* groups were attempting to compile different *horon* styles and putting on shows by standardizing and stylizing.

November 1997 was a turning point in my personal history, when I encountered ‘Lazness’ outside of my family, in other words my perception of Lazness as a secluded culture changed dramatically when I was introduced to the album of ‘*Heyamo*’¹⁷¹ by Birol Topaloğlu.

The musical form in this album was completely different than I knew as ‘Laz music’ before. First of all, I did not know that Laz used *kemençe* traditionally in a different way than popularly represented as extremely rhythmic accompanied by absurd lyrics. I was not familiar with any of those tunes at first. However, I was soon going to discover similar sort of music from my village when I asked some elders to perform. In

¹⁷⁰ Kalaycı thinks it was because some of the members of the group having political background which might have been as threatening by the administration.

¹⁷¹ *Heyamo*, Birol Topaloğlu, Kalan Müzik, 1997

short, I was able to embrace Topaloğlu's music considering instruments, vocals and arrangements. Besides, I was familiar with the language. Also, it was pretty flattering to see some musicians I knew already as contributors to the album like Erkan Oğur, Kardeş Türküler, Grup Yorum etc. This meant that Lazness was getting out of its pejorative and specific position with which I rarely identified with. However, my parents were not as enthusiastic as me and complained about their difficulty in understanding his dialect.¹⁷² Except the dialect problem, they were not that surprised by the music because they were already familiar with it from their childhood. Birol Topaloğlu confirms my observation:

There are two age groups that appreciate my works respectfully, the elders and the youth. The elders like me because I sing *destan*, which almost no one sings nowadays, and I revitalize their memory. Secondly, the youth like me because they acknowledge a respectful Laz music through the music I perform. The middle aged are not keen on me because they see themselves when looking at me, a memory that they made the most of to erase in order to integrate, to be modern. Particularly those who are confused about their Laz identity don't actually consume my music.¹⁷³

At this point, I can differentiate my Laz identity from that of my parents. If the identity is always a construction, then there are different constructions in our cases.

While I constructed my identity with my own experience of Lazness, my parents did

¹⁷² Birol Topaloğlu says that people are prejudiced about the dialect issue. If they pay attention to the lyrics there is no way not to understand but it is our people's tendency when you don't talk with their dialect they do not accept your dialect as Laz." Interview with Birol Topaloğlu, 16.9.2010 in Balat

¹⁷³ "İki yaş grubu var ki yaptığım işleri seviyor, takdir ediyor, birincisi yaşlılar ikincisi de gençler. Yaşlılar beni seviyor çünkü destan söylüyorum, çünkü artık söyleyen kalmadı ve eskileri hatırlıyorlar böylece. Gençlerin beni sevme nedeni ise Laz müziğini saygı duyulur bir biçimde icra etmem. Orta yaşlılarsa pek sevmiyorlar beni çünkü bana bakınca kendilerini görüyorlar. Modern olabilmek, entegre olabilmek adına o hafızayı silmek adına her şeyi yaptılar zamanında. Kimlikleriyle ilgili kafaları karışık olanlar genelde beni dinlemiyorlar." Interview with Birol Topaloğlu, 16.9.2010 in Balat

with their own experiences. Even there may be some intersecting points, still they should not be treated in the same way.

For example, as Lazness meant the tough village life conditions for my mother, she was not that enthusiastic when she listened to the songs of Topaloğlu until when she heard a tune revitalizing her childhood memories. And for me, Lazness only signified the unpleasant stereotype which I had chance to turn into a positive one with this single album.

The album Heyamo, where all the lyrics are in the Laz language, was in some way a gate opening to the world without affiliating with Turkishness: neither with the language nor through music. (There was no *bağlama* at all) That gate was so striking for me, apparently as well as for my generation. At the other side of the gate, however, there was a new possibility of Laz identity for me. It must be as surprising for Topaloğlu too, who emphasizes how the album attracted worldwide attention even before it was launched. We can say that the more his album circulated around the world, the more appreciation he received from the Laz community.

His musical journey actually is a good example of the Laz region's musical history starting with *bağlama* and ending up with *tulum* and *kemençe*. When he was giving concerts at universities and leftist environments he played Laz tunes too with his *bağlama*, which were attracting attention and people encouraged him to carry on. When the album of *Zuğası Berepe* was launched he came to realize that it was not a dream to produce an album of Laz music. Once his sense of Laz identity strengthened through his relations with *Ogni* circle, and his compilations on Laz music in Laz region, the journeys to Laz region in Georgia made him to decide to make an album with only in Laz

language. Realizing the context of *bağlama*, he developed a consciousness about the local instruments and instantly left *bağlama* for good.¹⁷⁴

The Movement mainly emerged in Istanbul and other metropolises and surprisingly “there was little sign that these intellectual activities in the diaspora were affecting notions of self and identity in the homeland”¹⁷⁵. Once, I came across with a complaint from a Laz living in Fındıklı: ‘they (the intellectuals living in urban) talk about Lazness but they do not care about us at all. They are the subjects and we are the objects of the Laz Cultural Movement.’ The following anecdote also confirms his interpretation.

Once, the intellectuals were planning a meeting in Istanbul gathering Laz from different social groups to discuss the ‘fate’ of the Laz culture. When I suggest inviting people from the region, one of the leaders’ words were shocking for me: “Oh yes, that’s a good idea. But there are no men left in the region. All the qualified ones moved to big cities and now there is no one that we can invite to this meeting.”

On the other hand, The Movement had a significant branch in Germany where the academic works of German scientists on the Laz culture were influential. At the beginning of the 1990s, the *Lazebura*¹⁷⁶ workshop was founded in Germany supported by the academic works of Wolfgang Feurstein, an anthropologist working about the Laz culture. In his interview with Neal Ascherson, Feurstein admits that he could not have

¹⁷⁴ Interview with Birol Topaloğlu, April 2010 in Balat.

¹⁷⁵ Chris Hann and Ildiko Beller Hann “Markets, Morality and Modernity in North-East Turkey” in *Border Identities: Nation and State at International Frontiers*, Cambridge University Press, Thomas M. Wilson, Hastings Donnan (Eds.), 1998, p. 257

¹⁷⁶ About Lazness

been just a researcher but an activist who is a volunteer for revitalizing the Laz language which faces the danger of extinction.¹⁷⁷ Feurstein, in cooperation with Fahri Lazoğlu, has devised an alphabet for Laz language that relies for the most part on modern Turkish characters¹⁷⁸ which has been widely used within the revitalization movement.¹⁷⁹ Those works were influential on the Laz expatriates, particularly the political asylum seekers living in Germany which then enabled the foundation of *Lazebura* in 1998.

Selma Koçiva, a political refugee living in Germany, who is one of the important actors of the movement, published her book *Lazona.alk*¹⁸⁰ She wrote about her passion for the Laz culture and accepted this revitalization movement as part of her revolutionary way of life. She was excluded though, even within the movement because of her ‘marginal’ political background. Even though, more or less all the leading actors of this movement had a past experience of joining the left political or social environments, her idealization of the Kurdish movement in terms of constructing a political identity, her respect for their outspoken demand of cultural rights from the state were not considered in favorable terms by these circles. Probably, living abroad also means being free of such “condemnations.” Moreover, she was also considered ‘too

¹⁷⁷ Neal Ascherson, *Karadeniz*, İşbankası Yayınları, İstanbul, 2001, p. 262

¹⁷⁸ Chris Hann and Ildiko Beller Hann “Markets, Morality and Modernity in North-East Turkey” in *Border Identities: Nation and State at International Frontiers*, Cambridge University Press, Thomas M. Wilson, Hastings Donnan (Eds.), 1998, p. 257

¹⁷⁹ Selma Koçiva tells how this alphabet circulated within the Laz community with excitement as well as fear. She says the migrants were taking the alphabet from Germany to Turkey inside the shirt packages in order to hide it from the Turkish state. A Seminar in Gola Association, in İstanbul, 9 May 2010.

¹⁸⁰ *Lazona* means “The Laz land”. Selma Koçiva, *Lazona Laz Halk Gerçekliği Üzerine*, Tüm Zamanlar Yayıncılık, İstanbul, 2000

political' for a woman. Typically, while the women are praised for being the conveyers of the Laz culture, they are marginalized when they are political subjects.

Even though men are in majority among the actors of the Movement, the number of women is increasing. For example, while there were not any *horon* conductors and *tulum* players earlier, there are many now, although their presence in the academy is still very negligible.

The Laz Cultural Movement can be described as an effort to substantiate the notion of 'Laz culture'. Thus they treat the 'Laz culture' as timeless and stable which obviously means standardization and homogenizing. Even though there were discussions on diversity in the movement, everyone was putting his/her Lazness in the centre. The discussions were frequently on the dialects of the language, while some were claiming the Hopa dialect to be the oldest and original in contrast with the ones considering the Pazar dialect as the most essential.

To mention other examples of the discourse on culture: the typical architecture that can be seen in the whole Eastern Black Sea region is called 'traditional Laz architecture'¹⁸¹. And on a women's day celebration, there was a discussion about what being a Laz woman means, assuming that there is only one single common experience. Some Laz intellectuals even claim that Laz culture is 'matriarchal' basing their argument on an suffix (-ona) that is used to call a person with his/her mother's or grandmother's family name when that woman has a significant role in the family. Similarly, Kazım Koyuncu was emphasizing how the women were playing important roles in the culture

¹⁸¹ Kamil Aksoylu, *Laz Kültürü, Tarih, Dil, Gelenek ve Toplumsal Yapı*, Phoenix Yayınevi, Ankara, 2009, p. 79

by interpreting the word 'oxori' (house) coming from the appendix -oxo (woman).¹⁸²

This example could also be interpreted as the 'house' being the domestic place of 'woman'. These examples also strengthen the 'Black Sea woman' stereotype as 'powerful' and 'resistant'.¹⁸³

The intellectuals in the movement pay lip service to the 'cultural difference' suspending any 'separatist' marking. In short, the Laz Cultural Movement mimics the nation state who constructs the national identity by defining the cultural realm through the categories like language, music, dance, folklore, architecture etc. As Meltem Ahıska says, the object of the power discourse may inevitably turn into the object of the oppositional discourse.¹⁸⁴

I have discussed the heterogeneity of the movement before, now I would like to mention another approach which privileges the Laz identity in a higher status while scaling it under the Turkish identity. The documentary film shot in 2008, 'The History of 4000 Years: *Lazlar*'¹⁸⁵, sponsored by EU funds as a part of the project 'the Place of

¹⁸² "*Lazlar'da kadının çok önemli bir yeri olduğunu söyleyen Koyuncu, bunu, çocukluğundan bir örnekle anlatıyor. "Laz kadını düşününce aklıma rahmetli babannem gelir. O tam bir Laz kadınıydı. Çok güçlüydü ve ailede her zaman karar yetkisi vardı. Tulumun sesini duydu mu yumuşar, sanki kadınlığını hatırlardı. Lazcada ev "Oxori" demek. Bu kelime, kadın anlamına gelen "oxo"dan türemiştir."* Interview with Kazım Koyuncu, Akşam Gazetesi - 03 February 2003

¹⁸³ While I was writing my thesis in March 2011, a group of urban-dweller women gathered through the network of ecological movement *Karadeniz İsyandadır*, decided to organize a women's day cortege under the name 'Black Sea's Rebel Women'. In their manifestation, they were praising how the Black Sea/Laz women were powerful (referring to the "passive" Kurdish women obviously) ignoring the injustice jobshare in the household or the 'Nataşa' phenomenon problems of the Black Sea women after the opening of the Georgian border. On the other hand, Kurdish women were prominently political in the public sphere much more, compared with Laz/Black Sea women.

¹⁸⁴ Meltem Ahıska, *Kimlik Kavramı Üstüne Fragmanlar, Defter*, V. 27, Metis Yayıncılık, İstanbul. 1996, p. 21

¹⁸⁵ '4000 yıllık Tarih Lazlar', Funda Özyurt, 2008

the Laz in the Turkish Cultural Mosaic'¹⁸⁶ used the notions of 'history' and 'culture' in that respect. On the one hand, directly praising the history and culture of the Laz, and reminding their loyalty to the state through some narrative and visual discourses, on the other.¹⁸⁷ While praising the Laz for their intelligence, the documentary was stressing on the mutual national culture and history by, for example, mentioning the 'Armenians' abuse' in 1910s and the Independence War.

An Institution between the Intellectuals and the People: *Sima*

So far I have assumed a divergence between the intellectuals and the people in terms of their definition of the Laz identity. Here, I would like to focus on another sphere between the two groups. Through my analysis of *Sima*, an association embracing the Laz identity, I would like to emphasize the context of the Laz identity in which it was articulated within the nationalist hegemonic discourse.

The reason why I position *Sima* between the intellectuals and the people is simply because I interpret the leaders' efforts as opening up a space for the representation of the Laz identity while refraining from marginalization, therefore having affiliations with the capital and state circles.

¹⁸⁶ 'Türk Kültür Mozağında Lazların Yeri'

¹⁸⁷ One of the informants said 'the Turkish language is as important as Laz language where they are both under invasion of English'. And it was likely to see the Turkish flag during the document as a part of the artistic construction of the scene. (For example people were carrying Turkish flag while dancing *horon*.)

Even though there have been several attempts to found a Laz institution since 1992,¹⁸⁸ in 1996, the delayed task was realized in Izmit. The name of the first Laz Association is called *Sima* Eastern Black Sea Service Association (*Sima Doğu Karadenizliler Hizmet Vakfı*). In May 2010, I went to Sima upon the invitation of Yılmaz Avcı (one of the board directors) who was so enthusiastic to gather all the Laz associations together. The story of the name Sima, actually summarizes the kind of dilemma that a group of middle class Laz experiences, who wants to preserve the Laz identity but at the same time obsessively fears being stigmatized in society. Gülay Burhan, the chief of *Sima* said:

There were long discussions about whether there should be the name ‘Laz’ in the name of the Association or not, at the end they decided not to do so. They (the board of directors) gave the name *Sima*, meaning you and me in Laz and ‘face’ in Turkish. As you know the conjecture of Turkey was not like that at that time. They hesitated of the name Laz. But in the constitution text, it is written that we serve to the Laz towns without mentioning Laz. But nowadays we are discussing to change the name and put the Laz in.¹⁸⁹

Yılmaz Avcı confirmed the hot debates on the employment of the name Laz during the founding process of the association, remembering someone who shouted ‘*Ne Mutlu Türküm Diyene* during the meeting!’¹⁹⁰ Burhan added that people from other Eastern Black Sea hometown associations were quite angry with them serving only the Laz population despite the reference of ‘Eastern Black Sea’ in the name.

¹⁸⁸ Ahmet Kırım’s personal archive, the presentation text of the meeting, 5. 12. 1992

¹⁸⁹ Gülay Burhan, meeting in Sima, 29 May 2010, Izmit

¹⁹⁰ Happy is the one who says I am a Turk!

When we went out of *Sima* with my friend and carrying on our conversation about Laz identity my friend said ‘Laz youth is squeezed between Laz nationalism and Turkish nationalism.’ The security guard waiting in front of the apartment stepped in the conversation at this moment saying “Can I ask you something? Do you think Laz youth and Turkish youth are two different things, I don’t think so.” My friend replied as “How dare you interfere in our conversation. Who are you?” he asked. “I am Laz, too. My family migrated from Batum to Of and I think there are no two different youths, no!”

This small dialogue demonstrates that Lazness can still be a controversial and tense subject in 2010. When we arrived at the restaurant that Gülay Burhan and his father were running, called *Motali* (Dear grandson/daughter), I had a chance to listen to the story of the foundation from Orhan Bayramin (the first chief). He said before *Sima*, he run *Artvinliler* and then *Arhivililer* Hometown Associations, and while he was running *Arhivililer Derneği*, they organized a picnic which was enormously popular. As Arhavi is the only town whose population is only Laz, members of other Laz towns’ hometown associations joined the picnic in the following year massively. At this second picnic, it was obvious for the founders that the Laz were eager to socialize with other Laz. Then they founded the association.

Some Laz intellectuals from Istanbul were criticizing them as being conservative, though, inviting all the military and governmental protocol at the opening including the old minister Meral Akşener from Nationalist Action Party (*MHP*).

The first chief of *Sima* told me that at the beginning of the foundation they established an insurance agency in order to make money for the association.

Surprisingly, they did not hesitate to franchise the army’s insurance agency OYAK.

Meanwhile they were about to publish a magazine of *Sima* about Laz culture. They put a

map of Laz region in the Black Sea. Once the magazine was published, their agency was cancelled instantly due to the separatist connotations of the map. This particular anecdote describes well how *Sima* positioned itself next to the power and was so confident that they did not hesitate to launch such a politically charged image.

Another anecdote is also useful for understanding how the Laz identity has been shaped with the notion of ‘class’. The first chief of *Sima* Orhan Bayramin complained about one of the old chiefs, a building contractor (*müteahhit*) taking advantage of the *Sima* network providing a business network for himself. Thus, Bayramin claimed that chief affiliated with non-Laz Black Sea community in order to do so. Bayramin admitted that he warned him both by writing and orally, accusing him of distorting the ‘homogeneity’ of *Sima*. Additionally, he made a quotation from him during a speech in the *Sima* invitation: “The Laz, have never been a minority in this country”. After this murmur, my friend remembered that during the relevant chief’s period, they attended the traditional *Sima* picnic with her family, usually with Laz rituals and entertainment, they noticed that there was little Lazness such as, a lot of *kemençe* instead of *tulum*, very few Laz songs, etc. I find this single anecdote quite significant in demonstrating how the performance of Lazness changes when affiliated with Turkishness and the capital.

From the folkloric events they organized¹⁹¹, to the visual organization of the place,¹⁹² *Sima* was positioning Laz identity within the existing power structures too, in

¹⁹¹ Yılmaz Avcı admitted that they did not do anything at all apart from folkloric events for the Laz culture. He was thus so enthusiastic to gather all the associations believing that one single person/association cannot help Laz. He was aware of the fact that Laz are not good at cooperation though.

¹⁹² As far as I could see, the Association was more like a coffee-house. There was a poster of Atatürk at one side, a picture from Uzungöl on the other. There was also the poster of Kazım Koyuncu and some other Laz bands. In a glass display, there were the news about *Sima* took place in the press, and some photos with from people in high positions including the Kocaeli representative of Nationalist Action Party.

that case, demanding nothing for the Laz in terms of cultural claims but treating the Laz identity as a folkloric entity. Their efforts to legitimate Lazness through the cooperation with the capital and the people from hegemonic status apparently failed in terms of opening up any space for the Laz in politics. The main function of the foundation was to enable the middle class Laz families socialize with others. So the contact with other cultural groups was not very likely within this structure.

Multiculturalist Discourse as a New Governmental Tool

These struggles around the cultural/ethnic identities are taking place within a context that has been increasingly shaped by the notion of “multiculturalism” as the cultural politics of Neoliberalism. The term multiculturalism refers to an applied ideology of racial, cultural and ethnic diversity. However, “one needs to rethink “how” difference and/or diversity is defined, recognized and staged; whether hierarchical dichotomies and “othering” mechanisms are challenged or reproduced under the rubric of multiculturalism; and finally whether multiculturalism is still a proper concept for resisting monocultural assimilation, or not.¹⁹³

Moreover, with the rise of the Kurdish struggle in the last decades and the process of admission to the European Union, Turkey had to change its dominant discourse on identity politics. The way national identity and national culture was

Moreover, in the emblem of Sima there is an anchor, waves of the sea and sparrow hawk representing the Laz culture.

¹⁹³ Bedirhan Dehmen, “*Appropriations of Folk Dance at the Intersection of the National and the Global : Sultans of the Dance*”, Unpublished M.A Thesis, Bogazici University, 2003,p. 84

constructed through denying or Turkifying different ethnic groups in Anatolia and the way national history misrepresented the experiences of these groups started to be criticized.¹⁹⁴

The Laz Cultural Movement was formed under these political circumstances. However it did not turn into a mass movement itself as the expectations and perception of the people were rather different from those of the intellectuals. Still, we cannot underestimate its impact on Lazness as an outcome when we come to the 2000s, concurring with other determinants like music industry, multicultural discourse, etc.

Towards the 2000s, the Movement added the notion of ‘ecology’ to its discourse in addition to culture, with the appearance of hot debates on the construction of new hydroelectric power plants, considering the two as components of the Laz habitat. We have to underline the Chernobyl case¹⁹⁵ at this point where the aggrieved discourse regarding the Laz as the real victims of the irresponsible state policies on environmental issues, was in parallel with the “subordination discourse” seeking to strengthen the Laz identity.

Those efforts of the middle class Laz youth generally were welcomed in the national media. However, the greetings were still included the reference of the Laz jokes.¹⁹⁶ Most of the journalists encouraged those works as a part of the ‘mosaics’

¹⁹⁴ Melissa Bilal, “*The Lost Lullaby and Other Stories About Being an Armenian in Turkey*”, Unpublished MA Thesis, Sociology Department, Boğaziçi University, 2004,p. 16

¹⁹⁵ The Chernobyl disaster was a well-known nuclear accident of catastrophic proportions that occurred on 26 April 1986, at the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant in Ukraine. It is considered the worst nuclear power plant accident in history resulting in the severe release of radioactivity, it is considered as the main reason for the increasing incidence of cancer, especially in the Black Sea region.

¹⁹⁶ Ali İhsan Aksamaz, “*Dil-Tarih-Kültür-Gelenekleriyle Lazlar*”, Sorun Yayınları, 2000, p. 197-268

discourse, at the same time warning in a threatening way not to accommodate any separatist intentions. After such a provocative heading: “Are we having another one?” implicitly referring to the Kurds, Ali Sirmen expresses his positive reception of *Ogni*:

Why we advice to be positive about it is not because Laz are around hundred thousand, not being majority in any city, rather live dispersedly in all around Turkey and we shouldn't consider it as a micro-nationalist movement as Ahmet Kırımlı said. To say that Laz institute means the first movement of a separatist flow would be a paranoid reflection like eating yoghurt with care when burnt while drinking milk.¹⁹⁷

Toktamış Ateş, was also welcoming the foundation of the Laz association in his article at Cumhuriyet. However, it seems not possible to mention about Laz without associating with the stereotype:

I respected the search for their identity of those (Laz) people who create their own jokes and laugh at them more than anyone, lovely, smart and a little bit obsessive citizens.¹⁹⁸

The Laz Cultural Movement was not taken as a real political threat for the nation state so far probably because the Laz have been loyal to the state conventionally. Moreover, due to the influence of the stereotype the Laz were fixed as the objects of the jokes instead of being a subject of politics; they were not a big population throughout the country and also the Laz culture have been so invisible that there was nothing left to be

¹⁹⁷ “*Olaya olumlu yaklaşılmasını önermemizin nedeni, salt Lazların nüfusunun yüz bin dolayında olması ve hemen hemen hiçbir ilde çoğunluk oluşturamamaları ve Türkiye'nin birçok yöresine ; hatta yurt dışına dağılmış biçimde yaşamaları değil. Hatta Ahmet Kırımlı'nın ileri sürdüğü gibi olay mikro-milliyetçilik akımı olarak görülemez. Laz enstitüsü düşüncesi, bir ayrılıkçı akımın ilk tohumlarıdır, demek süten ağzı yananın yoğurdu üfleyerek yemesinin de ötesinde bir paronaya belirtisi olarak da yorumlanabilir.*” Ali Sirmen, “*Şimdi de bu mu çıktı?*”, Milliyet, 11 October 1992

¹⁹⁸ “*Kendi fıkralarını kendileri üreten sonra da herkesten çok gülen bu sevimli, zeki ve biraz da takıntılı yurttaşlarımızın kendi benliklerini arama çabalarına saygı duydum.*” Toktamış Ateş, *Arayış, Cumhuriyet Gazetesi*, 27 November, 1993

afraid of except for a couple of young, excited, middle class, educated (wo)men. I have arrived at this conclusion in line with the experiences of this generation that I observed for ten years which has not been subjected to any serious sanction in response to their cultural, political activities.

Conversely, I think the Laz were setting an ideal example for a multicultural discourse, as an ethnic group having no political demands apart from “singing their songs, dancing *horon*” when it was no longer plausible to insist on a conventional nationalist discourse at this neoliberal age. When we come to the 2000s, the ideal was so exaggerated that we face with an excessive visibility of the Laz in the public, compared to its formerly invisible position. In the next chapter, I will discuss the limits of this public sphere and how this sphere was constructed through music and dance performances.

CHAPTER IV
A CRITICAL REFLECTION ON CULTURAL PERFORMANCES AND
IDENTITY POLITICS IN TURKEY

In this chapter, I will analyze the emergent musical and dance performances of Laz that took place in the urban landscapes in the 2000s. While claiming those performances as constructing a new representation and identity for the Laz, I question whether they open up any space for subjectivity of the Laz in the politics. Eventually, I will criticize the consequences of those performances as endorsing new scaling in the society by positioning Laz within the hegemonic discourses.

‘Performance’ as a Critical Tool

Scholars say that we can better understand cultural identity not by studying the artifacts of museums or libraries but through observing emergent performances.¹⁹⁹ Given that my primary goal in this thesis is to explore the changing context of the Laz identity in the last decade, it is crucial to investigate Laz cultural performances occurring in urban settings during this period because Lazness is, today, identified by its characteristic music and dance. My main concern, therefore, is to understand the contextual framework of these performances which functioned to transform an ‘invisible’ identity to an excessively ‘visible’ one. By using performance theory, I believe that one can look into things otherwise closed off to inquiry.

¹⁹⁹ Fine, Elizabeth C., and Speer, Jean Haskell, *Performance, Culture and Identity*, Praeger Publishers, 1992, p. 3

Looking at cultural performances of music and dance during the first decade of the twenty first century, one observes that, particularly in Istanbul, they reflect, shape, and embody today's Laz identity. Moreover, using the 'performance' category enables me to reflect on the issues at hand within their natural context of constant change. Hence my concept of 'performance' is not static but a dynamic one that enables me to trace 'transformation'.

Before going into the theoretical detail, I would like to take a moment to revisit my methodology. My focus group was composed of participants or performers aged 15-35 and coming from the second generation of Laz migrants. In order to understand their sense of Laz identity, I attended concerts, meetings, and demonstrations as the 'performances'. Besides observing the musical aspects (tunes, instruments, lyrics, rhythm, etc.) of those performances, I took note of the narrative discourses that emerged during the performances. Thus, the performers, location, and audience were all significant. Actually, I found those performances enormously interactive in which the audience plays an important role. I interviewed the performers and audience members, using both spontaneous and in depth interview methodologies. I also benefited from already existing interviews accessed from media and archives.²⁰⁰

Moving into theory, Bauman defines performance as "a mode of communicative behavior and a type of communicative event" or as an "aesthetically marked and heightened mode of communication, framed in a special way and put a display for an

²⁰⁰ Ayşenur Kolivar and BGST(Boğaziçi Gösteri Sanatları Topluluğu) opened their archives for me generously.

audience.”²⁰¹ Within this theoretical framework, I will demonstrate how the performances of music and dance changed contextually for the Laz in the last decade. These performances are, categorically, one of the important instruments for a group of people to imagine itself as a community.²⁰² Music and dance are significant spheres of asserting cultural identity²⁰³ particularly for rural-origin migrants in cities, who predominantly define themselves using dominant cultural categories.²⁰⁴

Much of the recent anthropological analysis of performance has emphasized how performance can work within a society precisely to undermine tradition, to provide a context for the exploration of fresh and alternative structures and patterns of behavior.²⁰⁵ Therefore, I care about those performances as an attempt to reconstruct the concept of ‘tradition’ by not only the second generation of Laz but also by the migrants from Black Sea in general.

While interpreting the relevant performances, my main concern was to observe conflicting and compromising aspects within the context of hegemonic discourse: Were these performances subverting the Turkish national discourse or reinforcing it? Considering the popularity of these performances, I attempted to explore at which point the performances coincide with, and at which points they resist, the hegemonic

²⁰¹ Richard Bauman, “*Folklore, Cultural Performances, and Popular Entertainments*”, Ed. Richard Bauman, Oxford University Press, 1992, p. 41

²⁰² Martin Stokes, “Place, Exchange and Meaning: Black Sea Musicians in the West of Ireland”, in *Ethnicity Identity and Music: the Musical Construction of Place*, Oxford, Berg, 1994, p. 134

²⁰³ *ibid*, p. 139

²⁰⁴ *ibid*, p. 140

²⁰⁵ Marvin Carlson, *Performance: A Critical Introduction*, Routledge, 1996, p. 15

discourse. This is because I question whether these performances open up or close a space for subjectivity for the Laz.

Kenneth Burke's contribution to the performance theory is that “not only the work or act but also the agent who creates or performs it, as well as the agency, scene, and purpose” is important.²⁰⁶ This critical perspective enables me to take into consideration the performers’ subjectivity and positioning along with their performances. Thus, focusing on the performers’ profile (including dress, accent, political stance, chosen repertoire, etc.) enables me to understand how meaning is generated within or towards the hegemonic discourse.

The Traditional Context and the Popular Representation of Laz Music until 2000s

In the process of transition from the Ottoman Empire to the Turkish nation-state, the modernization project laid by the Kemalist cadres tried to configure, like many other cultural elements, musical life, tradition, and preferences. The inspirational father of Turkish nationalism, the intellectual Ziya Gökalp, offered a roadmap for the creation- or, as he labels it, a rebirth or recreation- of a new national music. Simply put, this meant enriching the Anatolian folk songs with Western polyphonic sound structure. Put another way, it meant the spread of Western music culture throughout society resulting

²⁰⁶ *ibid*, p.14

in the revelation of real Turkish folk music and freeing it from the yoke of Ottoman-Arab culture.²⁰⁷

This simple formulation reflects the paradoxical framework of the whole Turkish modernization project: revealing Turkish ethnicity on its road to Western civilization while preventing a fully fledged “degenerated” Westernization for the sake of retaining the distinctiveness of “Turkishness”.²⁰⁸ As Necdet Hasgöl suggests, “the music policies-directed by the Westernization and Turkification desires- applied for the sake of having a modern polyphonic music, meant the “erosion ” of the regional and ethnic cultures within Anatolia”.²⁰⁹

It is obvious that music “has to be seen as a field of symbolic activity which is highly important to nation-states.”²¹⁰ Parallel to the Turkification policy, folk songs, belonging to various ethnic groups living in Turkey, were considered either non-existent or published with arbitrary Turkish lyrics which changed their meanings.²¹¹ Since there were no institutions or agents available to enable the reproduction of the musical forms out of the dominant culture where they faced extinction. The only tool they had in the face of this danger was popular music.

²⁰⁷ Ziya Gökalp, *Türkçülüğün Esasları*, Istanbul: MEB yayınları, 1990, p.33 Cited in Mustafa Poyraz Kolluoğlu, 2010, p. 11

²⁰⁸ Mustafa Poyraz Kolluoğlu, “*Modernism in Ottoman Empire and Turkish Music and the Years of 1930s, 1940s*”, Unpublished M.A. Thesis, Marmara University, International Relations Department, April 2010, p. 11

²⁰⁹ Hasgöl, Necdet, *Cumhuriyet Dönemi Müzik Politikaları*, in *BÜFK* V.62, 1996., p. 41

²¹⁰ Martin Stokes, “Introduction”, *Ethnicity, Identity and Music: The Musical Construction of Place*, Martin Stokes (Ed), Oxford/NY: Berg, 1994, p.15

²¹¹ Erol, Mutlu, “Kürt Müziği Üzerine” in *Kürt Müziği*, eds. Kendal Nezan, Mehrdad R. Izady, Ayako Tatumara, Erol Mutlu, Christian Poshe, Dieter Christensen, Avesta Yayınları, 1996, p. 60

In the twentieth century, many regional and minority folk music repertoires were transmitted by the media- radio, recordings, television, and motion pictures in the world. These media artifacts have, at times, served as models for all musicians to imitate, thereby fixing tunes, texts, and styles and working against versions and variants.²¹² In the case of Laz music, the compilations²¹³ were realized by personal efforts apart from the state-manipulated ones in the 1930s and 1940s.

Erol Mutlu explains the effects of this process on Kurdish music by arguing that, “Turkification policies ruined the ethnic and cultural multiplicity of Anatolia, reducing it into a singular structure within the new nation-building project. According to Mutlu, this caused serious erosion in Kurdish music and culture. The outcome was a destroyed culture that was detached from its roots and characteristics and a distorted musical structure.”²¹⁴

Some intellectuals point out the role of media as an ‘ideological apparatus’.²¹⁵ In line with this argument, I find it significant to remember the creation of a “standardized performing style and a ‘stagnated’ folk song archive which were transmitted to the people by means of the *Yurttan Sesler* program on the TRT. During the compiling process all the folkloric songs in Kurdish, Laz, Greek, Armenian, were “Turkified”²¹⁶ in

²¹² Jeff Todd Titon, ‘Music, Folk and Tradition’ in *Folklore, Cultural Performances, and Popular Entertainments*, Ed. Richard Bauman, Oxford University Press, 1992, p.169-170

²¹³ We must mention Birol Topaloğlu’s personal efforts here. As he was known for his compilations, not only from the Laz but also received a reasonable archive in order him to preserve and reveal. Lazeberi, Kalan Music, 2001 and Kizirnos, Colchis Music, 2010

²¹⁴ *ibid*, p. 60

²¹⁵ Louis Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses”, 1971, in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, New York: Monthly Review Press, 2001

²¹⁶ Necdet Hasgöl, *Cumhuriyet Dönemi Müzik Politikaları*, in *BÜFK* N.62, 1996, p. 43

the line with the national identity and national language that were modified by the Turkish Language Institution Inquiry.”²¹⁷ The TRT archives inherited from the ones made by Mustafa Sarısözen for the conservatory, did not include lyrics in other communal languages such as Kurdish and Laz.²¹⁸ The alternation in lyrics revealed dramatic and ironic incidents in some folk songs such as the one which was about a train voyage to Baku converted into a sea voyage to Samsun, because of absence of an essential Turkish word for the “train”²¹⁹ The performances that took place on the TRT were appropriated carefully with the nationalist ideology. Mutlu suggests that the practice of *Yurttan Sesler*, which excluded the original instruments of the music, forced the performance into a standardized instrumentation based heavily on different types of *bağlama*. He considers this one of the last steps in the Turkification process.²²⁰

While all solo singers perform to the accompaniment of the central Anatolian *saz* or *bağlama*, they are accompanied by other instruments as well as various solo regional instruments which indicate regional identity. As “a *mey* (a small double reed aerophone) represents the South East, a *kabak kemane* (a gourd fiddle) represents the Aegean, the accordion represents the North East, and so on. In the same way, the *kemençe* represents the Black Sea.”²²¹

²¹⁷ Mustafa Poyraz Kolluoğlu, “*Modernism in Ottoman Empire and Turkish Music and the Years of 1930s, 1940s*”, Unpublished MA Thesis, Marmara University, International Relations Department, April 2010 p. 148

²¹⁸ Besides the transforming lyrics from other ethnic languages to Turkish, the TRT also standardized Turkish accents from different regions.

²¹⁹ *ibid* p. 148-149

²²⁰ Erol, Mutlu, 1996, p. 60

²²¹ Martin Stokes, *Place, Exchange and Meaning: Black Sea Musicians in the West of Ireland*, in *Ethnicity Identity and Music: the Musical Construction of Place*, Oxford, Berg, 1994, p. 104

As Martin Stokes tells us, *kemençe* is situated as a part of national culture (*milli kültür*), in a hierarchical order with the primary traditional musical instrument ‘*bağlama*’. “The *kemençe* was widely considered to be a difficult instrument, with an uncompromising sound meaningful only to Black Sea people, whose fingering and performance is not reducible to a simple, teachable form. For some, the instrument palpably lacks what the *bağlama* is considered to possess in abundance: *mantık* (logic)”²²². Consequently, *kemençe* is expected to accommodate the *bağlama* because “all rural folk music is ultimately reducible to that which can be played on the *bağlama*. This instrument is held to have a particular “ethnic” association with the Turks of Asia as well as Asia Minor.”²²³ “Its use is iconic, in that its complex textures are often played down in the mix, but it figures heavily as an image in the televised broadcasts of these programmes featuring ‘regional’ singers. The TRT has its own distinct vision of the Black Sea as one regional musical style amongst a number of others. Like them, the Black Sea can be reduced in musical performance to an element in an orderly vision of a regionally diverse yet culturally unified state”.²²⁴

Performance, like any form of communication, carries the potential to rearrange the structure of social relations within the performance event and perhaps beyond it.²²⁵ In this respect, Martin Stokes’ example is relevant to our subject. He explicates how the traditional hierarchal positions of the instruments and the positions of the musicians

²²² *ibid*, p. 107

²²³ *ibid*, p. 107

²²⁴ *ibid*, p. 104-5

²²⁵ Richard Bauman, ‘Introduction’ in *Story, Performance and Event*, Cambridge University Press, 1986 p.4

were inverted when a group of Black Sea musicians, representing “Turkish” folk music, went to perform in an Irish festival.

When performing the Black Sea regional music preserving the command structure and hierarchy of instruments within the group typical of a Turkish Radio and Television ensemble they received poor appreciation from the Irish audience. Within that structure, *bağlama* is in the foreground and *kemençe* must reduce the complex interplay of polyphonic textures and inner rhythms of it to a single dimension in order to accommodate the *bağlama*. However the musicians tended to perform the Black Sea music as performed locally (*kemençe* is in the foreground, and performed in the style characteristics of the *kemençe*) when the Irish audience were much more enthusiastic with the performance.²²⁶

The above example reveals that instead of the nationalist constructed performance, the locality (Black Sea region) may manage to communicate in some contexts. This particular example shows us how “performance does not simply convey cultural messages already ‘known’ . On the contrary, it reorganizes and manipulates everyday experiences of social reality, blurs, elides, ironizes and sometimes subverts commonsense categories and markers.”²²⁷

“Music is socially meaningful not entirely but largely”, says Stokes, “because it provides means by which people recognize identities and the boundaries which separate them.”²²⁸ Music is used by social actors in specific local situations to erect and maintain distinctions between us and them, and terms such as ‘authenticity’ are used to justify

²²⁶ Stokes, Martin, 1994, p. 108

²²⁷ *ibid*, p. 97

²²⁸ Martin Stokes, “Introduction”, *Ethnicity, Identity and Music: The Musical Construction of Place*, Martin Stokes (Ed), Oxford/NY: Berg, 1994, p.5

these boundaries.²²⁹ In the present, as well as in the past, music has been one of the important indicators of Laz identity. Since Laz culture has been transmitted orally for centuries, the oral cultural features like music have been foundational for cultural reproduction and memory. However, I suggest that the affiliation with the modern life and written culture (the literacy in Turkish) has fundamentally transformed the music in Laz culture not only through the language but also the musicality.

There are different genres within Laz music which emerge in the appropriate context similar to other folk music. These include *bgara* (lament), *destan* (epic song), *horon* (collective dance songs), *nani* (lullaby), *heyamo* (work songs), and *atma türkü* (duet songs).²³⁰ Musician Topaloğlu also emphasizes the spatial context of the music:

The *destans* (epic songs) were performed in the outdoors usually when a person was alone and usually expresses his/her grief. Women sing when working in the garden, where their voice is anonymous and after the weddings under the *serender* (food store) away from the crowd. *Destans* were a basic component of the Laz music, however they evaporated after the 1970s, when mass communication arose.²³¹

I agree with Topaloğlu on his point that *destan* performances as well as other forms of Laz music vanished quicker than *horon* which survived because it served a purpose larger than simply ‘communication’. To put it other words, survival of the

²²⁹ *ibid*, p.6

²³⁰ However, if one were to ask an old Laz villager woman about her music, she would probably not give an example of a ‘*bgara*’ or a lullaby simply because she does not classify these as ‘music’. Like the music itself, these categories are ‘modern’ established by the Laz intellectuals in the last decade.

²³¹ “*Destanlar açık alanlarda, insanlar kendi başlarına kaldıklarında dertlerini dökmek için söylenirdi. Kadınlar genelde bahçede söylerlerdi sesleri kimin olduğu anlaşılmasın diye. Bir de düğünlerden sonra kalabalık çekildikten sonra serenderin altına geçilip söylenirdi. Destanlar Laz müziğinin en önemli formlarından biri olmasına rağmen, 1970’lerden itibaren iletişimin gelişiyile birlikte buharlaştı.*” *Destan* workshop conducted by Birol Topaloğlu in Gola Culture Arts and Ecology NGO in Beyoğlu, 9 February 2009.

horon was made possible by transforming it from ritual to a bodily entertainment and a spectacular show related to the notion of ‘velocity’ in the culture of modernity as I will elaborate later in the text. In my opinion, with the everyday life changes in the last fifty years in the region in terms of productions (tea farming) and consequent migration, the music was inevitably influenced. For example, tea farming disposed of agricultural life and the phenomenon of *meci* (collective work) and thus the collective work songs also disappeared. Moreover, the *destan* form was not compatible with modern life at all because the hegemony of the written culture disabled the oral cultural productions as well as the transmittance (usually improvised) through memory to the young generations.²³²

In the rural context, Laz music has traditionally arisen “from its context, from what it communicates in the performance situation”²³³ as the Armenian musicologist Gomidas’ following quotation also confirms:

The villagers are quite strict about the context of songs from different categories. All songs must be performed in a relevant context such as the work songs to be performed in the work place and the domestic songs are at home. A villager cannot possibly perform a harvest song at home. Thus, when a non-villager asks a villager to perform a song they would probably refuse to do so just because it is weird to perform a song apart from its related time and space. Every song is strictly related

²³² It is true that there is a large demand for music in high bits in all musical genres in Turkey as well as in the world as a part of the increasing value of the notion of ‘velocity’ through modernity. Thus, not only *destans* in Laz music but also other similar slow musical forms (like *dengbejs* in Kurdish music) tend to disappear.

²³³ Jeff Todd Titon, “Music, Folk and Tradition” in *Folklore, Cultural Performances, and Popular Entertainments*, Ed. Richard Bauman, Oxford University Press, 1992, p.168

with a ‘moment’ in the village life and once it is ruptured from its context, s/he wouldn’t comprehend, create or use it.²³⁴

So we can say that musical performances in the village are rather different than in the urban context. In the urban context, one can listen to a *destan* song followed by a *horon* song a few minutes later, and then a *destan* again. To put it in other words, one of the most important differences between the rural and the urban Laz music is their changing contextual determinants.

Another aspect that I would like to mention about Laz music is its ‘interaction’ with other ethnic groups’ music as it would be an unrealistic to claim an essentialist point of view. Referring to Stokes again, “the ‘places’ constructed through music involve notions of difference and social boundary.”²³⁵ As a part of constructing one’s identity, typically, there is always a controversy on music between physically close cultural groups. This is the case between the Laz and Hemşin people where some tunes belong to one or the other. On the other hand, in the urban context, the interaction takes place with other musical genres (like rock, pop, arabesque, etc.) and instruments.²³⁶

When we talk about music and dance performances of the Laz, weddings are the only public sphere in which collective performances occurred in the urban context until the 2000s. *Horon* dance accompanied by *tulum* has been performed mostly in the weddings or celebrations as well as (less commonly) in the hometown associations. In the city and the town centers of the Laz region after the 1970s, when the weddings were

²³⁴ Tamar Nalcı (Ed.) *Gomidas Bu Toprağın Sesi, Doğumunun 140. ve Ölümünün 75. Yılında*, Published as a Project of 2010 Istanbul European Capital of Culture, MAS Matbaacılık, 2010

²³⁵ Martin Stokes, *Ethnicity, Identity and Music: The Musical Construction of Place*, Martin Stokes (Ed), Oxford/NY: Berg, 1994, p. 3

²³⁶ Obviously this interaction does not stay in the urban but also dispersed to the rural.

supposed to take place in the *düğün salonu* (wedding halls), there was little time for *horon* (dance) with *tulum*.²³⁷ Instead, tunes from the repertoire of the ‘national potpourri’ from all over the country from ‘*misket*’ to ‘*halay*’ were played particularly in the 1980s and the 1990s, on a keyboard located on a stage. Towards the 1990s, besides rare performances, the new generation was even less enthusiastic about learning *horon* and other traditional musical forms.

What seems interesting to me is that *horon* and singing began to separate during these times. For example, while there was time for singing *atma türkü* (duet song) during *horon*, singing was almost abandoned and only *horon* was performed in the 1990s. That was probably linked to the changing context of the Laz language which was becoming more isolated and abandoned day after day in this period. On the other hand, even though the women were allowed in the *horon* circle, usually in hands of their kins, *horon* was quite gendered. The figures were rather masculine and all *horon* conductors and *tulum* players were middle-aged men at that period.

The use of *kemençe* in Laz music is, in fact, different than the popularly represented one, ‘*Pontic kemençe*’ from the Trabzon region. However, it has almost disappeared in the public performances accompanying *destans* in rural areas recently.

²³⁷ “When people discovered that it was cheaper and less troublesome to organize a wedding in the *düğün salonu* they left the *köy düğünleri* (village weddings) instantly. Firstly, there were the western style orchestras playing folk-pop music. At first, there was no *horon* with *tulum* (bagpipe) at all, it was considered as inappropriate. Then it took place at the end of the wedding just for half an hour. Once the organ joined the orchestra, the orchestra disbanded, the organ was the only instrument to play all the instruments itself”. (*Ne zaman ki insanlar düğün salonlarındaki düğünlerin daha ucuza geldiğini ve daha dertsiz olduğunu gördü o zaman köy düğünlerinden vazgeçildi. İlk başlarda tulumla horon hiç oynanmıyordu. Buraya uymaz diye düşünüyordu herhalde ki sonradan da sadece düğünün son yarım saati oynanmaya başlandı. Ondan sonra ne zaman ki orkestralar orgu keşfetti ondan sonra orkestralar dağıldı çünkü org, tek başına bütün enstrümanların yerine çalabiliyordu.*) Interview with Birol Topaloğlu, 16.9.2010 in Balat

Once the habitus of *destan* changed, it disappeared at a dramatic rate. When I first listened to the album *Heyamo*, I asked my mother whether we had any *kemençe* playing in our history. I was shocked when she referred to one of our relative's name whom I had never seen him playing *kemençe* at all. Not only *kemençe* itself but also the memory of *kemençe* with *destans* disappeared widely in Laz music in the rural context. Furthermore, in contrast with the 'rhythmic' and 'joyful' connotations of *kemençe*, Laz *kemençe* has rather sorrowful characteristic as I mentioned earlier.

Tulum, on the other hand, was completely excluded in the popular representation until the last couple of years. Now it has become the most popular musical instrument for the Laz.²³⁸ The exclusion of *tulum* might be because it is such a dominant instrument in terms of musicality and in no way accommodates *bağlama*. Besides its dominant musical characteristics, the challenges of playing *tulum* in an urban setting makes me define *tulum* as an untamable, resistant instrument. For instance, Birol Topaloğlu discusses the difficulties of practicing the *tulum* in the apartments in the city. He says, he had to go into the wardrobe to practice until he moved to his detached house. Similarly, another *tulum* player speaks of having to practice in the balcony of his apartment so as not to disturb neighbors.

The means by which ethnicities (as well as class subcultures) define themselves via music have to take into account the power relations existing between the groups who are in a position to define and the groups who are defined. An important and powerful

²³⁸ *Tulum* and *horon* is a common cultural characteristics shared by *Hemşinlis*.

agent in the process of definition has been the recording industry.²³⁹ When we look at the history of recording industry in Turkey, it is possible to find albums launched in the 1970s in the Laz language. However, they had an audience only within the Laz community. This includes Erkan Ocaklı, Ahmet Güngör, Yaşar Turna, Ayhan Alptekin and Engin Alptekin. Their music was generally fused with trendy musical genres of their day such as arabesque and *taverna*. Moreover, listeners in the Laz region had access to many *tulum* albums. It was no earlier than 1993 that Laz language music was presented to the national market.²⁴⁰

Even though a number of private media channels in the twenty first century have a ‘local’ concept flourished on TV and radio, the ‘Black Sea’ concept did not include the Laz language due to the presence of a nationalist broadcasting policy. On the other hand, pioneer performers of the Laz music with language in the national music market were *Zuğışı Berepe* along with Birol Topaloğlu, and also Grup Yorum, Kardeş Türküler and Fuat Saka in 1990s. However, in the 2000s, along with other happenings, the representation of the Laz music reached its peak with Kazım Koyuncu and a new musical genre appeared on the stage: ‘Black Sea Rock’. This meant that the people as well as music industry began to have access to Laz music in a different context.

²³⁹ Martin Stokes, “Introduction”, *Ethnicity, Identity and Music: The Musical Construction of Place*, Martin Stokes (Ed), Oxford/NY: Berg, 1994, p.20-21

²⁴⁰ *Zuğışı Berepe*, Vamişkun, 1993, Anadolu Müzik

Kazım Koyuncu and the Emergence of a New Laz Representation

Nowadays when I talk with anybody about the Laz in Turkey, the issue eventually comes to ‘Kazım Koyuncu’ and I frequently hear the words ‘after Kazım...’ That is to say, for the Laz, he became the symbol for transforming Lazness from an introverted position to one that is extroverted by introducing the Laz (language, music, etc.) to the non-Laz community. As a result, he is considered by the Laz to be more than a musician. In other words, many people in Turkey found out about the existence of the Laz community and its distinct culture through Kazım Koyuncu as opposed to the incorrect ‘Laz’ stereotype that was previously circulated.

Kazım Koyuncu is commonly described as “the person who enabled the new generation of Laz to like the ‘language’ and ‘music’”²⁴¹ and, more frequently, the person who presented ‘Black Sea music’²⁴² to a wider community. Obviously, beside Kazım Koyuncu’s authenticity as a musician and a human, there are some social facts that enabled his subjectivity that nearly turned him into an icon. I believe this was the outcome of his relation with the notion of ‘modernity’ and ‘tradition’ through musical performance as well as narrative discourses.

First of all, I would like to describe the musical and political environment in which he was involved before his nationwide fame. Kazım Koyuncu was born in 1972, in Hopa, a province of Artvin by the Georgian border where the population consists of Laz and *Hemşinli*. His musical career started in Istanbul, upon his departure from his

²⁴¹ ‘Koyuncu’dan Horona Davet’, Ercan Çelik, Radikal 04 April 2004

²⁴² “Denizin Çocuğu Giderken Çernobil Sorumsuzluğuna İsyân Başlattı” Hatice Tuncer, *Cumhuriyet Gazetesi* -03.07.2005

politics and public management education at Istanbul University. He founded a ‘political’²⁴³ music band called ‘*Dinmeyen*’ in 1992 performing in Turkish. Just after, as a consequence of his encounter with a Laz cultural activist Mehmedali Barış Beşli, they founded *Zuğışı Berepe*—a rock music band performing in the Laz language. In 1996, as soon as the band ‘*Dinmeyen*’ launched their album ‘*Sisler Bulvarı*’, the group disbanded. When, in 1998, *Zuğışı Berepe* disbanded too, Koyuncu carried on his musical career on his own.

Kazım Koyuncu’s encounter with Beşli was a turning point for his career. Despite his earlier indifference to his Laz origin, his affiliation with ‘Lazness’ from this point would lead him increasingly, until his death, towards being a phenomenon.

When we started to perform in Laz, to be honest, I hadn’t thought about it though. The main interlocutor was Mehmedali Barış Beşli at this subject. He had many ideas. When we were at the beginning, I don’t even remember that I had concerns about Lazness. I was thinking that I was helping to a fellow citizen through friendship; afterwards I was planning to leave. But once I got involved, I felt the enthusiasm, and I must say, I discovered the Laz language, Lazness and homeland when we were performing.²⁴⁴

Even though *Zuğışı Berepe* gained a modest success among university students²⁴⁵ they were not yet able to reach the Laz. On the other hand, their music,

²⁴³ Kazım Koyuncu’s self biography. www.lazuri.com

²⁴⁴ “*Şimdi Lazca yapmaya başladığımız zaman işin açıkçası ben çok fazla neden Lazca yapıyoruz diye bir şey düşünmemiştim. Bunun esas muhatabı Mehmedali Barış Beşli’dir. Onun birçok düşünceleri vardı. Ben hatta ilk başlarken çok da işin Lazlık boyutuyla çok fazla alakadar olduğumu hatırlamıyorum. Bir dönem hani ben bu adama yardımcı oldum nede olsa hemşo memleketli niyetiyle yan yana durduk arkadaşlık bağlamında ben sonra sözde gidecektim yani bırakacaktım fakat işin içine girince biraz heyecan kapladı. Lazca’yı Lazlığı memleketi şarkılar söylerken keşfetmeye başladığımı söyleyebilirim.*” Interview with Kazım Koyuncu on Umut Radyo, in Pazar(Rize). 3 February 2004 (Date uncertain)

²⁴⁵ Interview with Kazım Koyuncu by Deniz Durukan <http://www.studyoimge.com/makale/986/kazim-koyuncu-yla-soylesi>

particularly in the second album, *İgzas* in 1998 received a fair amount of appreciation among music circles.²⁴⁶ Even though the group was planning to experiment with music that would be ‘more authentic’ than the rock musical structure of *Zuğışı Berepe*, it was not realized once the group disbanded, and despite his plans of a Turkish album, it was left to Kazım Koyuncu to realize the ‘slightly modern ethnic music’²⁴⁷ (*etnik üstü az modern*) style.

The change of Koyuncu’s plans of a Turkish album in pop-rock sound mainly derived from the feedback he received from the music industry, when he performed in second volume of a serial album *Salkım Söğüt* in 2000²⁴⁸. Metropol music, which was famous for its ‘leftist’ political stance, launched the series of *Salkım Söğüt*, displaying different musical examples from Anatolia. The musicians on the album had political attitudes similar to that of İlkay Akkaya, Arzu Görücü and Alaaddin Us. Birol Topaloğlu contributed to the project with three songs in Turkish from the Black Sea region. Kazım Koyuncu performed in the second volume with two Laz, and one Turkish songs and, due to his articulate leftist political affinity, can be considered a more appropriate option than Birol Topaloğlu.

While the Turkish state was developing a ‘multiculturalism’ discourse in the twenty first century in accord with its liberal economic policies, multicultural and multi-lingual music was gradually growing in popularity. Performance in ‘other languages’

²⁴⁶ “Viya: Müsekkin Niyetine...” Aslı Atasoy, *Radikal Gazetesi* - 28 August 2001

²⁴⁷ Etnik Üstü Az Modern... *Evrensel Gazetesi* - 31 August 2001

²⁴⁸ Etnik Üstü Az Modern... *Evrensel Gazetesi* - 31 August 2001

apart from Turkish was gaining legitimacy.²⁴⁹ In a deeply political atmosphere which celebrated Kardeş Türküler, Fuat Saka, Koma Amed, etc., Kazım Koyuncu launched his album, *Viya* in 2001 and *Hayde* in 2004 again with Metropol Music.

Even though Koyuncu was popular amongst a small intellectual, counter-cultural, middle class consisting of different cultural groups living in urban settings, his fame became nation-wide when he appeared as the musical director of the soap opera *Gülbeyaz* in 2002.²⁵⁰ Even though most of his songs were in Turkish, and from the characters to the storyline the soap opera was highly cliché in terms of Laz stereotype, Koyuncu's 'Lazness' became prominent nationwide. Consistent amongst all of my informants, it is significant that they consider Kazım Koyuncu's popularity "a turning point for the representation of the Laz".

Koyuncu's fame doubled and he was turned into a legend after his early death at the age of 33 in 2005 because of lung cancer.²⁵¹ The way he died symbolized and was attached to the fate of people from the Black Sea who face cancer due to environmental poisons resulting from the Chernobyl accident. This accident was to be updated by the ecologists through the death of Kazım Koyuncu. His funeral was very crowded and the ceremony eventually turned into a demonstration of different groups that he was

²⁴⁹ Old Minister of Foreign Affairs İsmail Cem was showing off to his Swedish colleague by taking her some albums launched in Turkey from different ethnic languages before the announcement of EU candidates in Helsinki. That was meant to demonstrate the freedom on the ethnic cultures in Turkey. '*Helsinki'ye Kardeş Türküler*', *Milyet Gazetesi*, 26. 12. 1999

²⁵⁰ *Kazım Koyuncu'ya Üzüliyoruz*, Rock'n Roll Kültür Mecmuası - 27 May 2005

²⁵¹ We can see his poster everywhere attached with Black Sea as well as Laz. In a soap opera, on the display of the Laz café (*Benim Annem Bir Melek, Kanal D*), A Laz association Sima, Trabzon hometown Association in Istanbul, etc.

attached with: the Laz, the Black Sea community, the leftists, the anarchists, the ecologists, Kurds, Trabzonspor fans, and more.

The reasons that had turned Kazım Koyuncu into a phenomenon actually vary. First of all, having had personal contact with him, I must mention his personality and charisma that influenced all people, not just his fans. Tanıl Bora refers to the ‘sincerity’ that he had which is so scarce in show business.²⁵² Mine Kalaycı, one of the provisional vocals of his group, tells of how impressive his performance was onstage--often emotional and always highly energetic. “Before the concerts, he used to say ‘we first should enjoy this, then the audience will enjoy it’”.²⁵³

Koyuncu’s popularity revealed that, somehow, he managed to reach many people from different cultural and political circles. Even though politically and musically his performances were not as hard as Zugaşı Berepe’s were²⁵⁴, he still declared his political stance as a ‘leftist’, sometimes ‘anarchist’, ‘revolutionary’ at every opportunity. “I am a leftist person. Generally speaking, it means standing by the subalterns, the poor, and the

²⁵² Tanıl Bora, “Ümit Kıvanç’ın Kazım Koyuncu Belgeseli - Şarkılarla Geçtim Aranızdan: Bir Kıt Kaynak Olarak Samimiyet”, *İletişim Yayınları* V.227, March 2008

²⁵³ Interview with Mine Kalaycı in May 2010

²⁵⁴The reporter: Why did you orient to folk music from rock?

Kazım Koyuncu: I was a rocker who listened to rock music, wearing torn trousers looking like a vagrant. Mehmet Ali Barış Beşli was missioned for the revitalization of the Laz language. He insisted on founding the group Zugaşı Berepe. My aim was different. But once I involved in, I realized the magical aspects, the village, my childhood, the grape vines... Until the year of 1998, we launched two albums. Once I started to my solo career, we can say that I became coherent to the system. (He laughs).

Gazeteci: Lazca sözlü rock müzik yaparken neden folk müziğe döndünüz?

Kazım Koyuncu: Rock müzik dinleyen, yırtık pantolonla dolaşan serseri görünümlü rocker'dım.

*Mehmedali Barış Beşli de Lazcanın yaşaması misyonunu üstlenmişti ve Zugaşı Berepe'yi kurmamız için ısrar etti. Amacım farklıydı. Ama işin içine girince büyümlü taraflarını görmeye başlıyorsun. Köy, çocukluğum, asmalar... 1998 yılına kadar iki albüm yaptık grupla. Solo kariyerime başlayınca sistemle uyumlu hale geldiğim söylenebilir (gülüyor). “İnsan Yaşamak İstiyor”, *Sabah Gazetesi* - 04 May 2005*

proletarians. One step further, my leftism is close to anarchism in terms of aesthetics.”²⁵⁵

Koyuncu was, however reluctant to articulate his point of view on concrete political issues unless questioned.²⁵⁶ I found his political stance to be ‘humanist’ referring to ‘antimilitarism’,²⁵⁷ ‘peace’, ‘freedom’,²⁵⁸ ‘equality’, ‘fraternity’,²⁵⁹ etc. The stress on ‘political matters’ shifted from ‘identity politics’ to ‘environmentalism’, which was much more akin to popularization.²⁶⁰ Koyuncu’s sympathy for Trabzonspor also linked him to the dominant culture through football and its attachments with nationalism and male culture.²⁶¹ Therefore, I claim that his profile was moderate enough for the national media to employ. I believe that, besides everything, his authenticity was embedded in the way he expressed his life philosophy, as extremely poetic.

Stoeltje and Bauman suggest that “time takes on another dimension during the performance itself when the past, the present and implications or the future can confront

²⁵⁵ “*Solcu bir insanım. Genel anlamda solculuğun anlamı da, ezilenlerin, yoksulların, emeğiyle hayatta kalmaya çalışanların yanında olmak. Solculuğumun bir adım ötesi de, estetik anlamda anarşizme daha yakın bir duruştur.*” *Trabzonspor Dergisi* - 10 May 2004

²⁵⁶ In his interview with the leftist magazine *Kaldıraç* he was advocating that demanding cultural rights is a political stance which is crucial for the cultural groups to survive but against the idea of a ‘new state’, ‘new boundaries’. “However everyone is free to do whatever they want.” *Kaldıraç*, 2000

²⁵⁷ Koyuncu performed in the demonstration of World Conscientious Objection Day (*Dünya Vicdani Retçiler Günü*) on 15 May 2003
<http://www.savaskarsitlari.org/arsiv.asp?ArsivTipID=5&ArsivAnaID=14024>

²⁵⁸ “He was wishing for a free world in peace” “*Bariş içinde özgür bir dünya dilekleriyle...*” *Polifoni.net* - 26 Haziran 2005

²⁵⁹ His words of ‘I brought the greetings from the ‘children of the sea’ to the ‘children of the mountains’ (*Denizin çocuklarından dağların çocuklarına selam getirdim*) when they were on a concert in Diyarbakır, were then turned to be a symbol of his sense of fraternity. “*Asi yürek: Kazım Koyuncu*”
<http://www.yuksekovahaber.com/haber/asi-yurek-kazim-koyuncu--32743.htm>

²⁶⁰ Ayşenur Kolivar, “Kentli Bir Yerel Kimlik Temsili Olarak Karadeniz Rock”, *Müzikte Temsil Ve Müziksel Temsil II Sempozyumu*, 20 October 2010

²⁶¹ *Trabzonspor Dergisi* - 10 May 2004

each other. Cultural performances build themselves out of tradition, the known and the familiar linking the present and the past, yet the new and different must be integrated as well to ensure fascination and excitement. Moreover, cultural performance provides a time to acknowledge and reflect upon social states and conditions and the opportunity to create new relationships.”²⁶² For many, Kazım Koyuncu played a crucial role in a perception change from ‘primitive’, ‘introverted’, ‘irritating’.²⁶³ Black Sea music to a ‘pleasant’, ‘modern’ and ‘inviting’ music.²⁶⁴ I think he managed to do that by linking the ‘modern’ with the ‘traditional’.²⁶⁵ Therefore, the instruments played a symbolic role rather than mere musical instruments. Once the perception of music changed from an unpleasant to a pleasant one, the sense of identity of the Laz and the Black Sea was inevitably changed and transformed to a ‘desired’ one. The dream of Laz intellectuals was not only a renovation of the music but also of the identity. Here, we can obviously observe how performances are important to “mark or change” identity.²⁶⁶

Koyuncu’s music was frequently said to be widening from ‘traditional’ to ‘universal’.²⁶⁷ I interpret the term ‘universal’ here as referring to ‘consumability’ by a wide mass throughout the ‘nation’, while the music is defined as ‘world music’. I found

²⁶² Cited in Beverly J. Stoeltje and Richard Bauman, ‘The Semiotics of Folkloric Performance’ in *Semiotic Web* 1987, Mouton de Gruyter, Berlin, New York and Amsterdam, 1988, p. 592

²⁶³ “Kazım Koyuncu'ya Üzülüyoruz”, Rock'n roll Kültür Mecmuası - 27 May 2005

²⁶⁴ “Viya: Müsekin Niyetine...” Aslı Atasoy, Radikal Gazetesi - 28 August 2001

²⁶⁵ I would like to emphasize here that I don’t accept those concepts as taken for granted. For example, when we look at İsmail Türüt, his music is rather mixture of modern and traditional too using organ, electro-*bağlama* etc. But this hybridity do not cause to a ‘modern’ context now but maybe in the 1980s.

²⁶⁶ Richard Schechner, *Performance Studies*, Routledge, 2002, p. 46

²⁶⁷ “Koyuncu’dan Horona Davet”, Ercan Çelik, Radikal 04 April 2004

this quite contradictory because as much as this music is defined as ‘global’, it is defined as ‘inappropriate to the norms of the music market’ (*piyasa*)²⁶⁸ at the same time. On one hand, the music market’s norms were looked down upon and found inappropriate by the ‘revolutionary’ political stance; on the other hand, the potential of the music to be circulated around the world was praised. Moreover, the above differentiation also assumes that ‘popular art’ is always ‘low art’ in contrast with Meral Özbek’s point of view who suggests that popular music might also be valuable in terms of musicality and may include a sort of resistance discourse within,²⁶⁹ pretty much similar to Hall’s argument: ‘just as musical performance enacts and embodies dominant communal values, it can also enact in a powerful, affective way, rival principles of social organization.’²⁷⁰

When I evaluate the ‘performance’ as a whole, (from musicality to narrative discourses) I suggest that there are resistant, challenging and mainstream aspects of Kazım Koyuncu as a phenomenon. On the one hand, he was opening up a space for the representation of an ‘invisible’ community, Laz through a new hybrid musical form. On the other hand, he was not marginalized but became popular among different social groups. I arrive at this conclusion through several facts. First of all, he was Laz, but his Lazness was not ‘demanding’ apart from the recognition of the Laz language. Put it in other words, his cultural identity claim could be considered ‘moderate’.

²⁶⁸ Interview with Kazım Koyuncu by Ebru Drew Vatan Gazetesi 18 April 2004

²⁶⁹ Özbek, Meral, *Popüler Kültür ve Orhan Gencebay Arabeski*, İletişim Yayınları, İstanbul, 1991

²⁷⁰ Stuart Hall and T. Jefferson (eds.) *Resistance Through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Postwar Britain*, London, Hutchinson, 1976 Cited in Martin Stokes, 1994, p. 13

When I am referring to my Lazness, I don't mean a nationalist point. I can't consider myself to be as fool as to be a (Laz) nationalist. I advocate everyone to express his/herself independently, let everyone sing his/her song...²⁷¹

Secondly, from his fluent Turkish accent²⁷² to his urbane manner, from his gestures to his shabby rocker appearance, he was an urban-dweller who had adapted to urban life successfully.²⁷³ His performances did not work to dig up the painful memory of the Laz. Rather, he was a good example of integration that Laz youth could identify with. In short, part of the reason for his success was the marketability of his 'Lazness' throughout the nation due to his ability to slot into a widespread definition of 'Lazness' as mystical²⁷⁴ and spiritual. Moreover, his Lazness turned into 'Blackseanness'. Even so, this was not his primary concern²⁷⁵ - he focused first and foremost on being a 'revolutionary musician' and this opposition rather associated with the environmentalism instead of identity politics.²⁷⁶

²⁷¹ "Lazlığımдан bahsederken milliyetçi bir noktayı kastetmiyorum. Milliyetçi olacak kadar salak bir insan olma ihtimalini hiç görmüyorum kendimde. Herkesin kendi ifade etme özgürlüğünü savunuyorum, herkes şarkısını türküsünü söylesin..." Interview with Kazım Koyuncu, "N3aşa Exti" Roll, V. 99, July, 2005

²⁷² Interview with Kazım Koyuncu by Ebru Drew Vatan Gazetesi 18April 2004

²⁷³ One of the reporter was saying that "from your hair to your dressing you don't look like a Black Sea guy." Interview with Kazım Koyuncu by Ebru Drew, Vatan Gazetesi 18 April .2004

²⁷⁴ I use the term "mystic" in the meaning of "hidden", "untouched", "incomprehensible" and "irrational".

²⁷⁵ This reminds me an article's heading: 'Turkish Leftists Do Not Have Ethnic Identity Problem, Rather They are from the World . Yelda, "Türk Solcularının Etnik Kimilik Sorunu Yoktur, Onlar Dünyalıdır", *Birikim Aylık Sosyalist Kültür Dergisi*, 'Etnik Kimlik ve Azınlıklar' Özel Sayı, V. 71-72, March- April, 1995

²⁷⁶ "Ben bir müzisyenim, ondan sonra biraz Karadenizliyim, ama hepsinin ötesinde ben bir devrimciyim." "Denizin Çocuğu Giderken Çernobil Sorumsuzluğuna İsyân Başlattı", Hatice Tuncer - Cumhuriyet Gazetesi -03.07.2005

The most popular song²⁷⁷ that Kazım Koyuncu performed was *Didou Nana*. This song was known as a Laz song in the Megrelian dialect of Laz, far different than the one spoken in Turkey and by the Georgian border. Interestingly, a song representing the Laz was pretty much incomprehensible for the Laz in Turkey. The song was first performed by Birol Topaloğlu in 'Heyamo' album but rearranged by Kazım Koyuncu. Apparently, making it move faster made it more popular.²⁷⁸ That demonstrates how the effect of the same song can be different when the form is changed.

Even though Koyuncu's music has not circulated around the international world music market yet --apart from the migrant communities living abroad- his music fits the definition of 'World Music' well: "exotic spiritualism and a distinctive, yet accessible musical style from a unique and distant locality".²⁷⁹ The multilingual lyrics, the unsophisticated *tulum* and *kemençe*, and unfamiliar rhythmic structure (5/8 and 7/8 bits) gives the music its 'distinctive spiritualism'. On the other hand, songs with absurd Turkish lyrics, the pop-rock sound keeps the music familiar at the same time as well as Koyuncu's well communicating subjectivity.

Stuart Hall asserts that, "the Diaspora experience is defined, not by essence or purity, but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity by a conception

²⁷⁷ The song memorized even at a 'distinct' town Kızılkaya in Mardin. It was so impressive to see a crowd of 80.000 Kurds accompanying the song *Didou Nana*, when we performed in a festival with my band. At that moment, I had the chance to observe how music and performance was so powerful in terms of communication and obviously Koyuncu's case was a successful example of communication going beyond linguistic obstacles. His fame in the Kurd region was not because of media only but also his live performances. As he staged on many festivals in the South East, he had many fans too.

²⁷⁸ The song became so popular that it was rearranged by Volkan Konak with Turkish lyrics and Ayhan Alptekin with Laz in Ardeşen dialect.

²⁷⁹ John Connell and Chris Gibson, "World music: Deterritorializing Place and Identity", *Progress in Human Geography* V. 28,3, 2004, p. 342 -361

of “identity” which lives with and through, not despite difference; by hybridity.”²⁸⁰

Thus, I do not assume its existence in pure, authentic forms when I refer to Laz or Black Sea music here. For example, Birol Topaloğlu, though well-known as a performer of ‘authentic- traditional’²⁸¹ Laz music, performs highly hybrid music. His performances are also inspired from different musical traditions elsewhere in the world and include instruments such as the didgeridoo (from Australia) or a tabla (from India) next to the *tulum* in his concert performances. As some degree of hybridity was central to all kind of world music, this music can be considered neither Laz music, nor rock music but a hybrid form called ‘Black Sea Rock Music’.

As a critique of Adorno,²⁸² who claims that all popular music at some point involves a ‘standardization’, Nedim Karakayalı suggests that popular music is more complicated than simply a ‘standardization’. He claims that we expect popular musical genres to have ‘familiarity’ and at the same time ‘authenticity’²⁸³. I accept the concept of ‘authenticity’ here as similar to Ayhan Erol’s: an attempt to embrace a musical genre, tune, style from the past and at the same time rejecting some old musical styles and as a consequence constructing a new musical genre by conjoining the one in the present with

²⁸⁰ Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora", *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, Ed. Jonathan Rutherford, London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990, p. 235

²⁸¹ Kazım Koyuncu was referring to the authenticity of Birol Topaloğlu’s music too, supposing that he was performing ‘pure’ Laz music in contrast with himself. “*Etnik Üstü Az Modern*”, Evrensel Gazetesi - 31 August 2001

²⁸² “Essays On Popular Music”, *Studies in Philosophy and Social Science*, Institute of Social Research, New York, 1941, p. 438 & p. 443

²⁸³ Nedim Karakayalı, Doğarken Ölen: Hafif Müzik Ortamında Ciddi Bir Proje Olarak Orhan Gencebay, *Toplum ve Bilim*, V. 67, 1995, p. 142-143

new musical styles.²⁸⁴ In this respect the authenticity of Kazım Koyuncu's music on the one hand embraces Laz/Black Sea tunes and on the other harmonizes them with urban instruments and musical styles which move his music in the direction of the common representation of Black Sea music that was performed by musicians such as İsmail Türüt, Mustafa Topaloğlu and Davut Güloğlu.

Stokes stresses that, "the dominant culture, through the music industry and media, attempts to re-appropriate the space for its own purposes. The moment it does this, new stylistic criteria for articulating an inflected 'difference' vis-à-vis the dominant culture are found by the subcultural group."²⁸⁵ Therefore, I assume that the music that Kazım performed until his last days was the product of the music market and the dominant culture conjoining with the Black Sea community's cultural needs.

After Koyuncu's tragic death, People's Houses (*Halkevleri*) adopted the copyright of some of his unpublished works (most of them were in Turkish and not in Black Sea musical characteristics) and some live concert recordings, and launched them as a new album.²⁸⁶ Once the album was launched, the income was donated for founding a cultural center with Kazım Koyuncu's name to provide free musical education and other services for the youth. This simply demonstrates that his political attitude was compatible with the *Halkevleri* emphasizing his revolutionary stance over his Lazness. On the other hand, I interpret the musical style of the unpublished recordings rather different from Koyuncu's popular musical style.

²⁸⁴ Ayhan Erol, Popüler Müzikte Otantisite, *Toplum ve Bilim*, V. 106, 2006, p. 197

²⁸⁵ Martin Stokes, "Introduction", *Ethnicity, Identity and Music: The Musical Construction of Place*, Martin Stokes (Ed), Oxford/NY: Berg, 1994, p.19

²⁸⁶ Şarkılarla Geçtim Aranızdan, January 2007

Interestingly, Kazım Koyuncu's popularity reached the Laz community much later. Actually, only after his death, he turned into an icon within the Laz community, as he was complaining about this fact earlier. When a reporter asks about the reactions of the Laz towards his music:

I think they would be much happy if I performed in Turkish. Laz people are interesting. (...) Our audience is by majority non-Laz intellectuals. (...) If I performed in Turkish, or a non-sense popular stuff they would welcome enthusiastically. But now, they say 'How nice, he is an artist from our hometown Hopa'.²⁸⁷

Black Sea is the place I was born, no doubt, I will be buried there too. But, we will start our tournament from Diyarbakır. I gave many jolly concerts there. Even sometimes they embraced me more than Black Sea people. So it is a significant place to start by.²⁸⁸

One of his colleagues said:

For example, Kazım Koyuncu was not popular in Black Sea as much as in the East. On the contrary, he was very popular there. Our Kurdish brothers and sisters used to listen to him.²⁸⁹

We can say that even Koyuncu's frequent 'visits' to the 'East' did not marginalize him. For example, while there is no legal obstacle, we can hardly ever listen

²⁸⁷ "Sanırım Türkçe müzik yapsam çok daha mutlu olurlardı. Lazlar enteresandır. Daha çok Laz olmayan, aydın bir kesim bizim müziğimizle ilgileniyordu. Fakat Türkçe yapsaydım, hatta popüler ya da saçma sapan bir şeyler yapsaydım, belki daha coşkuyla karşılardı. Şimdi ise "A, iyi, bizim Hopalı sanatçımız" diyorlar. " <http://www.studyoimge.com/makale/986/kazim-koyuncu-yla-soylesi>

²⁸⁸ "Karadeniz doğduğum yer, şüphesiz ölünce de gömüleceğim. Ama turneye Diyarbakır'dan başlayacağız. Diyarbakır'da daha önce çok keyifli konserler vermiştim. Yeri geldi, beni Karadenizliler'den daha fazla sahiplendiler. Önemli bir başlangıç noktası benim için." Interview with Kazım Koyuncu by Ebru Drew, Vatan Gazetesi 18 April 2004

²⁸⁹ "Mesela Kazım Koyuncu Karadeniz'de doğuda olduğu kadar popüler değildi. Tam aksine Doğu'da çok popülerdi. Kürt dostlarımız kardeşlerimiz çok dinlerdi. " Asi yürek: Kazım Koyuncu <http://www.yuksekovahaber.com/haber/asi-yurek-kazim-koyuncu--32743.htm>

to a song in other ethnic languages²⁹⁰ –I put the TRT Şeş in a different context- but Kazım Koyuncu’s videos. There might be several reasons for that but I think one of the reasons might be because of his ‘distance’ to the Kurdish audience. Let me elaborate my conceptualization with an anecdote. As far as I know, on one of his performances in the region, the audience demanded a Kurdish song. However, he rejected this demand by saying “accept me as a Laz. Consider me as a Laz and a friend’.²⁹¹ To elaborate, let me give an opposite stance where I interpret Birol Topaloğlu’s performances of singing a Kurdish song in the accompany of *kemençe* in a *Newroz*²⁹² fest, or performing *destans* on the same stage with Kurdish dengbejs is rather opposite of Kazım Koyuncu’s position of no interaction, ‘neutralism’ in a way.

I interpret the Kurdish audience’s embrace of Kazım Koyuncu as an effort to position him in the same disadvantaged side though, disclosing the denial of the multicultural structure of the country which claimed the population as homogeneous with a single shared identity. On the other hand, I suppose Kazım Koyuncu interpreted his popularity as a consequence of the ‘recognition’ of Kurdish identity by ‘visiting’ them. I do not mean to say that he was looking down on them- that would be incorrect, but I would like to underline the ‘distance’ again.

As I mentioned at the beginning, I suggest that Kazım Koyuncu became a phenomenon not primarily because he was performing for the Laz, but for the ‘others’.

²⁹⁰ Burcu Yıldız, ‘Türkiye’de Popüler Müzik ve Çokkültürlülük Üzerine Notlar...’ 3 January 2009 http://www.bgst.org/muzik/yazilar/popmuzik_cokkulturluluk.asp

²⁹¹ “*Beni Laz olarak kabul et, bir Laz ve bir dost olarak kabul et*” quotation by Mehmedali Barış Beşli . Asi Yürek Kazım Koyuncu <http://www.yuksekovahaber.com/haber/asi-yurek-kazim-koyuncu--32743.htm>

²⁹² A Kurdish traditional spring festival.

But, despite the identification of the second generation Laz and Black Sea migrants, the more his fame circulated around the nation, the more the Laz and Black Sea community eventually embraced his legend.

Authenticity of ‘Black Sea Rock’ Music

Apart from his contribution to the ‘visibility’ of the Laz himself, as well as changing the pejorative perception of the Laz identity, Kazım Koyuncu set an example with his popularity for the Laz youth, as well as youth from other Black Sea origins, especially after his death. The music he made eventually turned into a genre as ‘Black Sea Rock’ music with bands following him after his death.²⁹³ The legacy of Koyuncu was insomuch influential that some were involved with this music without knowing anything about Laz music themselves.²⁹⁴

While focusing on the extrinsic aspects of the performance, one should not ignore the intrinsic, aesthetic aspects of it assuming that “the very notions of the aesthetics were themselves historically constructed and productive of the meanings that

²⁹³ Through the interviews with the representatives of these bands, Ayşenur Kolivar suggests that not only the fact that Kazım Koyuncu became an icon for them but also it revealed that Koyuncu himself encouraged those youngsters with personal contacts to perform Black Sea music. (Ayşenur Kolivar, “Kentli Bir Yerel Kimlik Temsili Olarak Karadeniz Rock, *Müzikte Temsil ve Müziksel Temsil II Sempozyumu*” 20 October 2010)

²⁹⁴ Erdal Bayrakoğlu was saying that once he prepared to launch the album, he didn’t know anything about Laz music at all. “I arranged the songs, prepared the notations but when it came to ask the *tulum* to play, he couldn’t because our compositions were not appropriate for the *tulum*’s characteristic, having only five notes.” Interview with Erdal Bayrakoğlu, from the archive of Ayşenur Kolivar, 19 May 2009, Istanbul

had wider social and political implications”.²⁹⁵ We can define the music of Kazım Koyuncu and the ‘Black Sea Rock’ music as re-arranged traditional multi-lingual songs (very few compositions) from the Black Sea region, with traditional instruments like *tulum*, *kemençe*, *kaval*, and accordion as well as classical pop-rock instruments like drums, classical guitar, electro-guitar, bass guitar, and sometimes flute and violin. Since the music engages the body through rhythm,²⁹⁶ and can be classified as entertainment, it can be considered popular music from Adorno’s perspective which defines the popular music as either ‘rhythmically obedient’ or ‘emotional’²⁹⁷.

Despite the numerous bands and performers,²⁹⁸ I would like to dwell on the common characteristics of their performances and especially the characteristic of ‘entertainment’. *Horon* has been as important as the musical performances in that attendees often went to concerts merely for the *horon*.²⁹⁹ Similar to tragic dramas which began as a ritual performed in religious festivals during the epoch of the tragedians Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides then turned into mere performances, the position of the *horon* has shifted from ritual to performance.³⁰⁰ The main reason for this change is embedded in the notion of ‘context’. That is to say, while there was a social context of

²⁹⁵ Bedirhan Dehmen, *Appropriations of Folk Dance at the Intersection of the National and the Global : Sultans of the Dance*, Unpublished M.A Thesis, Bogazici University, 2003, p.105

²⁹⁶ Theodor Adorno “Essays On Popular Music”, *Studies in Philosophy and Social Science*, Institute of Social Research, New York, 1941, p.440 & p. 445- 449

²⁹⁷ *ibid*, p. 460

²⁹⁸ At least ten bands founded after his death: Gurgula, Nena, Marsis, Empula, Ezmoce, Karmate, Feluka, Erdal Bayrakoğlu, Filiz İlkay Balta etc.

²⁹⁹ *Kolbastı* has been also popular and even turned into a phenomenon in the last couple of years but I will not dwell on here as it should be investigated on its own.

³⁰⁰ Richard Schechner, *Performance Studies*, Routledge, 2002, p. 39

the *horon* in the traditional, rural context, in an urban setting *horon* can take place almost anywhere and anytime. Moreover, the form of *horon* changed³⁰¹ aesthetically as well as its subjects and norms. Nowadays, the youngsters dance *horon* more than elders as it was the case in the last decades. Furthermore, there are now woman *tulum* players as well as *horon* conductors.

The music critic Murat Meriç criticizes those musicians for distinguishing this musical genre from Anatolian Rock as having no originality but merely mimicking Kazım Koyuncu. There is actually such a common impression about the albums and performances of those bands after Koyuncu. Even most of the soloists were accused or praised for mimicking him.³⁰² Erdal Bayrakoğlu admitted this: “We all attempt to mimic him, even out of our will, we inherited a lot from him anyway.” Moreover, he emphasizes on the repetition of the same musical structure even the repertoire and how the music industry forces to produce the same kind of music but does not allow you to make any difference.³⁰³

While the audience’s profile is varied, they were mostly young people of the second generation of Black Sea immigrants in big cities ranging in age between 15 to 35. The audience should not be imagined as passive recipients but rather active in terms of contributing to the performance with dance and maintaining the repertoire.

³⁰¹ Avcı tells how the youngsters exaggerate the *horon* figures as it now turned to a show nowadays. The interview with İsmail Avcı, from the archive of BGST (Boğaziçi Gösteri Sanatları Topluluğu) 2009.

³⁰² “*Karadeniz’de rock çağı*”, 12 October 2006, Taraf

³⁰³ Interview with Interview with Erdal Bayrakoğlu, from the archive of Ayşenur Kolivar, 19 May 2009, Istanbul

In all of the performances I attended, I felt the tension that derived from the expectations of the audience for rhythm in high bits to be able to dance. This kind of music was expected to entertain more than anything else. Erdal Bayrakoğlu mentions this pressure, “even though we prepared a repertoire before the concerts thanks to the song proposals from the audience, you end up merely entertaining them. You are identified with ‘entertainer’ as a Laz band.”³⁰⁴ This comment gives the impression of the Gypsy stereotype which is similarly identified.

On the other hand, Hikmet Akçiçek who performs Hemşin music with his group *Vova* known with its ‘calm’ musicality mentions this tension even though they do not care. Another member of *Vova*, Mustafa Biber says, “We have rhythmic songs actually, we could have arranged them in even faster bits but we rather perform them in our own way.”³⁰⁵ Let me share another example from a different case. On her first live performance, Filiz Ilkay Balta, one of the rare woman *tulum* players, changed the order of her repertoire after three songs during the concert feeling tense expectation from the audience and started playing rhythmic songs instead of slow ones.³⁰⁶

“The performance environment or space is also essential”³⁰⁷ for investigating for a better understanding of the performances. I would like to stress how performances transform the performance places more so than other rock or pop bands do. First of all, the ‘cool’ performance halls like Balans, Studio Live, Jazz Stop, Babylon, etc.,

³⁰⁴ Interview with Erdal Bayrakoğlu, from the archive of Ayşenur Kolivar, 19 May 2009, İstanbul

³⁰⁵ Interview with Vova, “Bu Dünya Soğuyacak”, Roll (Date uncertain)

³⁰⁶ 25 December 2009, Studio Live, Taksim

³⁰⁷ Beverly J. Stoeltje and Richard Bauman, ‘The Semiotics of Folkloric Performance’ in *The Semiotic Web 1987*, Mouton de Gruyter, Berlin, New York and Amsterdam, 1988, p. 592

previously only featuring ‘universal’ Turkish or Western pop/rock music, opened their doors to ‘local/country’ music in order to make a profit; in other words, they had to recognize them.³⁰⁸ The ideal performance hall was one having a square or round stage for the audience to join in dancing the *horon*. The performance locations are usually chosen according to their suitability for both music and dance. Thus, places like conference halls were not acceptable for participants. Moreover, the limits of the location was always exceeded and the entertainment carried beyond to the halls and the street. This extension was perceived as the peak moment of the entertainment.

Music and Politics in the Twenty First Century Turkey

According to the multicultural discourse which appeared in the 2000s, it was accepted that the country consists of different ethnic groups having distinct cultures from each other. This became obvious as communication was highly democratized with the use of the Internet, etc. In other words, there was no possible option for the state but to accept this simple truth. Under these circumstances, the ‘mosaics’ discourse was then articulated by the state in order to maintain its power and legitimacy according to the new governmental technologies.

The mosaics discourse was built on flattering the cultural resourcefulness of Anatolian heritages from the Ottoman Empire, accepting the multicultural structure of

³⁰⁸ In 2007, when we went to Balans in order to organize a *horon* dance night, we hesitated at the beginning not knowing how our demand was going to be perceived, the musical director greeting our proposal pleasantly admitted that ‘since Kazım, this (Black Sea Rock) music turned into an important genre and thus we welcome such organizations’.

the society but in the condition of hierarchical order with the Turkish culture (dominant culture vs. subculture) without any interaction with each other.³⁰⁹ Accepting the representations of the ethnic groups themselves at some point this mosaics discourse, however, requires a superficial way of representation having no affiliation with history and politics. In Turkey's praxis of multiculturalism, I suggest that the history and politics were highly suppressed by legitimizing the multi-lingual music. In the end, the communities who were allowed to perform their songs in their mother tongue were expected to be satisfied with the provision of the exclusive cultural policies so far. That roughly meant, in the hegemonic discourse, "don't tell me whatever I did to you in the history to assimilate you, and don't remind me of the pains I caused. Just sing your songs now and forget the past."

Robert Spam criticizes this perspective by saying, "I am not suggesting that multiculturalism is simply 'fun', a culinary delight where one wanders from a falafel one week to sushi next, with salsa dancing on Friday night and samba Saturday". He mentions that "any substantive multiculturalism has to recognize the political realities of injustice and inequality and the consequent existential realities of pain, anger and resentment, since the multiple cultures invoked by term 'multiculturalism' have not historically coexisted in relations of equality and mutual respect."³¹⁰

³⁰⁹ Burcu Yıldız, 'Türkiye'de Popüler Müzik ve Çokkültürlülük Üzerine Notlar...' 3 January 2009 http://www.bgst.org/muzik/yazilar/popmuzik_cokkulturluluk.asp

³¹⁰ Robert Spam, "Multiculturalism and the Neoconservatives" in *Dangerous Liaisons Gender and Postcolonial Perspectives*, Anne McClintock, Aamir Mufti, and Ella Shohat, eds. Cultural Politics, University of Minnesota Press, v. 11, 1997, p.200 Cited in Melissa Bilal, "*The Lost Lullaby and Other Stories About Being an Armenian in Turkey*", Unpublished MA Thesis, Sociology Department, Boğaziçi University, 2004, p. 17

Indeed, the majority of Laz were satisfied with this favor, unlike Kurds and Armenians who demanded that the state face up to the historical mistakes and the pain it caused. Moreover, Kurds were rather demanding about their cultural rights such as education in Kurdish and regional autonomy. The majority of the Laz were already reluctant to position themselves as a ‘subaltern’³¹¹ group, and wished only to be ‘visible’ in the public sphere apart from the previous common stereotype. To put it other words, the recognition of cultural difference was acceptable as long as it is positioned as high(er than Kurds) but at the same time within the dominant Turkish culture. In practical terms, this means that they tended to define Lazness as a ‘subculture’ group with distinct cultural characteristics but still within the larger culture.³¹²

In the next step, I will suggest that through musical performance the Laz present an acceptable ‘locality’ that can be ‘consumed’. The consumption was not only through the album sales and concerts but also material via accessories (scarves having particular texture from Black Sea) and mobile phone tunes, etc. The first generation had not experienced the production of the Laz identity though consuming cultural products, but learned it from the second generation.³¹³

³¹¹ In contrast with the above definition, the chief of RIDEV (The Federation of the Associations of Rize) who is from Laz origin, declared that ‘Laz has never been a subculture, but always been in the dominant one’. Meeting in RIDEV, in 2008 May. Similarly, in the *horon* event of Laz Culture and Solidarity Association, in İstanbul in November 2010, once the chief mentioned the assimilation policies of the nation state on Laz culture during the opening speech, there were murmurings among the attendants claiming that the Laz were not suppressed at all. A woman even reminded of ‘our Laz’ Prime Minister as a proof.

³¹² I differentiate the position of the Kurds, Armenians, Greeks who considered themselves as oppressed by the state while having distinct cultural characteristics without linking them to the dominant culture.

³¹³ The younger members of the family organize going to a concert or buying albums, downloading *tulum* tunes for their mobile phones from the Internet for their parents.

In addition to the above, a secluded culture became apprehensible moderately by ‘singing their songs and not demanding more’. In that way the Laz were under control when they were visible in the public sphere from the prism of the ‘panopticon’. However, the limits of the public sphere are cloudy. That is to say, the Laz language may exist only in a musical form in a concert hall, but not in a state office, and not on TV. For example, while I was working for a festival organization in Rize, we were supposed to write the Turkish names of the villages in a petition even though they were not in use within the public, writing the festival leaflet in the Laz language was not even imaginable. Similarly, the Laz language was not allowed as a state broadcasting language.³¹⁴

The revival of ethnic cultures is taking place by fetishizing ‘the cultural heritage of Turkey’ only in particular ways. Renato Rosaldo calls this an ‘imperialist nostalgia’, in other words, ‘mourning over what one has destroyed. When the monolithic cultural discourse lost its power of persuasion, people started to search for the hints of different cultural groups. Rosaldo says that, “in any of its versions, imperialist nostalgia uses a pose of ‘innocent yearning’ both to capture people’s imaginations and to conceal its complicity with often brutal domination.”³¹⁵ I consider this musical genre as nostalgia of the Laz language, which is supposed dead. Such an apolitical music was obviously cut out for the music industry.

³¹⁴ “Turkish state television’s new Kurdish channel will not be followed by similar channels in Laz, Georgian or other languages spoken in Turkey, or by a channel broadcasting in Zazaki, a Kurdish dialect, said the state minister responsible for Turkish Radio and Television Corporation, or TRT, Mehmet Aydın yesterday.” Hurriyet Daily News, 5 February 2009

³¹⁵ Renato Rosaldo, “Imperialist Nostalgia” in *Culture and Truth: The remarking of Social Analysis*, Beacon Pres: Boston, 1992, p. 69-70

In short, despite the fact that the ‘denial’ of the multicultural population in Turkey, the cultural policies has not been transformed to a real ‘recognition’ and intention to keep alive those cultural differences considering the inefficient legal changes in the constitution. Moreover, claiming cultural rights in order to sustain cultural values is still controversial and has not gained its legitimacy yet in Turkey. Thus, we are far away from the ‘multicultural’ society for the present in the lack of a legal and social reform.

The Function and the Limits of the Multilingual Repertoire

When we look at the performances in general, there is always an “assumption of responsibility to an audience for a display of communicative skill”.³¹⁶ A particular performance will communicate different information to a human audience, and this information will vary depending on who the viewer is.³¹⁷ As all the performances being in the city inevitably means facing a foreign audience at some point, I can reflect on the tension involved in appropriating the repertoire arranged in the eye of ‘other’ from personal experience.

When we look at the repertoires of the bands that perform ‘Black Sea’ music particularly, they are more or less all multilingual (Laz, Turkish, Hemşin, Georgian,

³¹⁶ Marvin Carlson, 1996, *Performance: A Critical Introduction*, Routledge, p. 14

³¹⁷ Adrienne L. Kaeppler, ‘Dance’ in *Folklore, Cultural Performances, and Popular Entertainments*, Ed. Richard Bauman, Oxford University Press, 1992, p.197

Megrelian) while giving the Laz language a place of prominence.³¹⁸ However, the repertoires were expected to have ‘balance’ in terms of languages. My music band *Dalepe Nena* deals with this issue by putting the songs in order, not placing too many Laz songs one after another and putting a few Turkish songs in the repertoire in order to provide some familiarity for the audience. That tension can also be interpreted as performing in the eye of the other—assuming that not being capable of understanding the lyrics would cause boredom or concern about whether the content of the lyrics may be politically ‘unfavorable.’

Multi-lingual performances served to soften any political appearance.³¹⁹ The multilingual repertoire suggests that, “I have no separatist intentions, I care about my identity just as much as his or hers”. This helps performers avoid stigmatization as micro-nationalists. Therefore, the emphasis here is on ‘similarity’, not difference. That is to say, all the Black Sea languages and consequently the cultures may be substituted for each other at the expense of isolating nationalist reflections either from the Black Sea community or the Turkish.

The way, the ‘multi-lingualism’ was used was different for *Zuğaşı Berepe* though. In their case, the motivation of performing a few Hemşin songs along with Laz, was the intended “contribution to the peace between Laz - Hemşin historical conflict”.³²⁰

³¹⁸ Most of the soloists are Laz originated and names of the bands are usually in Laz such as Nena, Gurgula, Karmate, Marsis, Empula...

³¹⁹ As an example of such a perception, I would like to mention the Turkish Republic’s 75th anniversary celebrations, where a Laz song ‘Heyamo’ performed where no other ethnic languages took place in the show except Turkish.

³²⁰ Zuğaşı Berepe, “*Görmeyelim, Duymayalım, Lazona’da Lazca Konuşulmadığını*”, Roll. (Date uncertain)

What I would like to underline is the emergence of the ‘historicality’ here, compared with the commensurability of the languages in the contemporary musicians’ performances.

Furthermore, the fusion of the cultures of the Black Sea, under the genre ‘Black Sea Rock Music’ is very likely to be related to the music markets besides politics. The market attempted to gather all the ethnic groups together by addressing all of them through the multi-lingual repertoires supposing that they wouldn’t constitute large enough market demand individually.³²¹

What attracts my attention is the frequent exclusion of Pontic Greek from the repertoires, which I found out was probably because the stigmatized position of the language and suspected imperialist conspiracy theories of the Greeks. I was once in a meeting with almost all the representatives of the ‘Black Sea music’ bands attended, a guy from Trabzon commanding Pontic Greek as well as Turkish, asked everyone why they did not perform in this language. There were a few answers claiming that they were not familiar with this language so rather not to perform instead of misarticulating. Then a Turkish reporter provoked everyone to admit that referring to Pontic Greek still has a dangerous stance in Turkey thanks to existing conspiracy theories. Later, the musicians admitted that this was likely a correct explanation.

Similarly, some Laz intellectuals once dared to warn some members of my women band not to deal with the Pontic Greek songs but rather to concentrate on Laz songs. Even though we did not experience any difficulty in performing in the Greek

³²¹ Ayşenur Kolivar, “Kentli Bir Yerel Kimlik Temsili Olarak Karadeniz Rock, *Müzikte Temsil ve Müziksel Temsil II Sempozyumu*, 20 October 2010

language, it was maybe because we, as women, were not perceived as dangerous political actors. Nikos Mihailidis³²², however tells about how he received threats and condemning messages while being stigmatized as a Greek spy when he launched the album ‘*Horon ke Trağodia*’ in 2001.³²³

Therefore, we can say that the Laz language and identity is not considered to be dangerous when compared with Pontic Greek. Another signifying example of this argument is that the inclusion of the band *Zuğışı Berepe* and Kazım Koyuncu and exclusion of all other rock-pop bands of other local languages (for example Ciwan Haco) in the discography book of Anatolian Rock Bands³²⁴ despite the writer’s obvious nationalist stance. In short, the groups in this musical genre generally have a moderate political standing that enable them to achieve popularity.

³²² Nikos Mihailidis is a third generation Pontic Greek migrants whose family migrated from Black Sea to Greece compulsory in 1924, and came back to Turkey for MA education in Boğaziçi University. Beside his studies he involved in music as playing *kemençe*. He carries on PHD in USA, Philadelphia University in anthropology and studies studying about *kemençe in Trabzon*.

³²³ Interview with Nikos Mihailidis, June, 2009

³²⁴ Cumbur Canbazoğlu, Kentin Türküsü, *Anadolu Pop-Rock, Pan Yayıncılık*, 2009, Istanbul
There was a quotation mark of Aşık Veysel at the beginning of the book called ‘We are Turks and We perform *Türkü*’.

The Laz as Good Citizens of Multicultural Turkey

As “entertainment, the telling and passing on of stories, is thus one of the primary ways in which cultures speak to their members and thereby maintain a sense of coherence, indeed of history,”³²⁵ these concerts are significant venues for the Laz youth to feel and perform their Lazness as well as maintain contact with their cultural memory and, inevitably, history. The performances in the city obviously provide a face-to-face physical contact in the city, unlike the gatherings of members who are related to each other with kinship or geography (*akrabalar ve hemşehriler*). Those performances bring the Laz together from different social backgrounds who actually do not know each other and consequently enable them to abstract Lazness in a particular way where the sense of ‘identity’ strengthens.

In a concert of *Empula* -a Laz band performing Black Sea Rock music- I asked a Laz girl from Ardeşen, in her early twenties from the audience, whether those performances influenced the Laz. She said:

I don’t think the Black Sea people intend to convey their cultures. They just want to have fun. The music of İsmail Türüt, etc. suits my parents’ taste. We can see absurd lyrics, absurd singers on Black Sea channels, they don’t suit us, the youth. Our culture is this (pointing at the band on the stage).³²⁶

³²⁵ Eric Barnouw and Catherine E. Kirkland, “Entertainment” in *Folklore, Cultural Performances, and Popular Entertainments*, Ed. Richard Bauman, Oxford University Press, 1992, p.52

³²⁶ “Karadenizlilerin kendi kültürlerini yayma gibi bir durumları yok kesinlikle, onlar sadece eğlenmek istiyorlar. İsmail Türüt’lerin filan müziği annemlere babamlara göre, Karadeniz televizyonlarında saçma sapan sözlü şarkılar, şarkıcılar var, onlar biz gençlere hitap etmiyor. Bizim kültürümüz bu.” Empula Concert, Live Studio/ Beyoğlu, 18 February 2009

The quotation above demonstrates how the performances construct the past and the present by making divisions and setting up new relations. In this case, this musical genre makes a differentiation between the first and the second generation Laz migrants' perception of the Laz identity and musical taste. Secondly, as I proposed to emphasize the undemanding character of these performances, the above quotation also exemplifies such an attitude and perhaps indirectly refers to the 'demanding' Kurds.

The study of media messages and their effects has made clear that despite, and perhaps because of, the innocuous associations of the label, entertainment plays a significant role in the cultivation of values and beliefs and the socialization of values and beliefs and socialization of children. Entertainment's impact is embedded in premises that are not debated and may not even be clearly articulated but are accepted by audiences in order for the experience to have meaning. Its influence is pervasive and cumulative.³²⁷ Any weightier role of communication, such as education or persuasion, are assumed to take a back seat, in contrast to other types of content such as news, political communication, or advertising. Entertainments may indeed inform or persuade, but it is generally presumed that these effects are secondary or incidental and will not interfere with the real function of pleasant diversion. This assumption is embedded in such phrases as 'mere entertainment' and 'pure entertainment' and the idea of entertainment as an escape from reality.³²⁸

Thus, the notion of 'entertainment' provides a public sphere in which Lazness becomes 'apolitical' and consequently 'safe'. These performances enable the Laz youth

³²⁷ Eric Barnouw and Catherine E. Kirkland, "Entertainment" in *Folklore, Cultural Performances, and Popular Entertainments*, Ed. Richard Bauman, Oxford University Press, 1992, p.51

³²⁸ *ibid*, p.51

to identify with their 'origin' without concern of stigmatization. This is different from their parents. These performances may provide good opportunities for the Laz, though, to produce the means for revitalizing their language. But this music does not seem to have a deliberate concern with the identity politics yet.

The following example demonstrates how the Laz language and Laz identity is relieved from its political attachments when it was performed through music and still perceived as dangerous when it is 'spoken'. This is probably because when the language is revealed as a song, particularly when the lyrics are pastoral, it is considered a museum artifact, as dead. However when someone is speaking it means it is still a living creature thus dangerous in terms of politics.

A family friend from Rize who runs a kiosk in Beyoğlu, having close relations with people from upper positions in the state and army expresses proudly being a Turkish nationalist of Black Sea origin while expressing hostility about Kurds at every opportunity. I once went into his kiosk and saw him watching Birol Topaloğlu in a concert in a local Black Sea channel. He started grumbling once Topaloğlu started speaking Laz after singing a Laz song. He said "We always loose because of this (act)". I said, "Should we deny the existence of the language or what?" He said "No, I like it too, even if I don't understand it, I still listen to it, but I am against of this kind of advertisement". I asked "What would you do, as the Laz language is disappearing?" He then responded, "Don't worry it will survive, people are speaking it, but I don't want them to advertise it; not to be separatists like the Kurds".

We can say that the 'identity' issue cannot be articulated without referring to the Kurdish Political Movement in Turkey. As Stokes suggests, "social performance... is seen as a practice in which meanings are generated, manipulated, even ironised, within

certain limitations. Music and dance... do not simply 'reflect'. Rather they provide the means by which the hierarchies of place are negotiated and transformed.”³²⁹ Through my investigations, I found that these performances construct the Laz identity by affiliating with the Kurdish identity like a specter in direct or indirect ways.

When I ask AYTEKİN ÇAĞ, the soloist of Empula, what he thought about the “anxiety emerged in the public whether the cultural demands of Laz would evolve to the political demands like the Kurds” he said he would rather approach the issues “without making a differentiation between the Laz and the Kurd” but at the same time differentiating them like “the Laz have always embraced their country and nation, I demand the freedom for the Laz that was already provided for the Kurdish TV, radio and music.”³³⁰ He then sent me an introduction text of their group including the following words:

A baby is not given milk, unless s/he cries. We (the Laz) never cried, always smiled to the world. Maybe we were wrong because we were forgotten usually. Do we object to all these? No, on the contrary, we are here to do what our ancestors did in the past: in order to make the globe to feel how we enjoy life we play our *tulum*, *kemençe*, accordion, and guitar. Come, and share our joy, like we promised everyday in the primary school: Our reason of existence is to present our lives as a gift to the others.³³¹

³²⁹ Martin Stokes, Introduction, in *Ethnicity Identity and Music: the Musical Construction of Place*, Oxford, Berg, 1994, p. 4

³³⁰ “Bir defa ben Kürt ve Laz ayrımı yapmadan olaylara bakmaya çalışıyorum, Lazlar bu ülke de her zaman vatanına milletine sahip çıkan bir kesimdir, Kürt TV ve radyolara vede şarkılarına tanınan özgürlüğün Lazlara da tanınmasını istiyorum.” Interview with AYTEKİN ÇAĞ, February 2009

³³¹ Ağlamayana meme vermezlermiş. Biz hiç ağlamadık. Hep güldük dünyaya karşı. Belki de suçumuz buydu da unutulduk çoğu zaman. Bunlara itiraz mı ediyoruz biz: Hayır. aksine; aynen atalarımızın yaptığını yapmak için karşınızdayız: içimizdeki hayat sevincini tüm dünyaya hissettirebilmek uğruna almışız elimize tulumumuzu, kemençemizi, akordeonumuzu, gitarımızı... Haydi siz de gelin ve bu hayat

The above quotation once more expresses how ‘Lazness’ is only legitimized in the realm of ‘entertainment’ business. That obviously means sticking to the Laz stereotype as an ‘entertaining’ object through the Laz Jokes. While the Laz were entertaining the ‘nation’ with the jokes before, now they do so with ‘music and dance’, we can say. Anthias also says that this kind of stereotyping fixes cultures in stone and can lead us to over-celebrate cultures as though they exist in little boxes and are to be cherished and fostered, whatever their contents and whatever the social practices/outcomes are ‘claimed’ for them. She argues that liberal multiculturalism often falls into trap and she says that this perspective can also lead us “to condemning cultures, particularly the cultures of those we see as the ‘other’ as ‘different’, as not like ours, those of the foreigners, the ‘traditional’ groups as we might stereotype them.”³³²

In one of the concerts I attended, I asked a businessman from Gaziantep in his late thirties who was invited by one of his colleagues from Trabzon what he thought about the concert, he said: “I liked the environment actually very much. It is one of the scarce places in which the Kurds do not exist.” Without realizing what he meant, I asked whether he is a Kurd or not. He said: “No, I am not. I don’t actually have any hostility towards them. But it seems to me that in Easterners’ environment, women and men cannot enjoy things together like here.” That means to say, not only the performers but also the audience may associate the performances with a hierarchical ‘difference’ with Kurdish identity.

sevincini bizimle hissedin. Aynen ilkokulda hepimizin her sabah içtiği anttaki gibi: varlığımızın tek nedeni tüm insanların varlığına varlığımızı hediye etmektir.” Interview with AYTEKİN ÇAĞ, February 2009

³³² Anthias, 2002, p. 276

Performance is said to be a mode of cultural action which is not a “simple reflection of some essentialized, fixed attributes of a static, monolithic culture but an arena for the contestant process of renegotiating experiences and meanings that constitute culture”.³³³ Therefore, it would not be an exaggeration to say that those performances dispersed the pejorative connotations of the Laz identity as well as the language, music and dance, etc. In this way, some of the goals of the Laz intellectuals were realized by the musical performances. However, another stereotype was on the stage: mystic,³³⁴ revolutionary, ecologist, dynamic, tempered, cheerful, and confident. Equipped with such characteristics, Laz identity has turned to a desired one that many people would like to identify with. Music provides “means of imagining a more fractured way of positioning one self in time and space, a technique more characteristic of those diasporic, displaced populations whose experience of modernity is one of transience, hybridity, and placelessness.”³³⁵ Obviously, this musical genre eventually enabled the second generation of migrants to position themselves in time and space in contrast with the ‘placeless’ first generation.

As in the recent past, Lazness is still frequently attached to the geography of Black Sea in a mysterious way. This mystification was actualized either by the outsiders

³³³ Marvin Carlson, *Performance: A Critical Introduction*, Routledge, 1996, p. 179

³³⁴ I think this mysticism is strongly related with the perception of the Black Sea region as “egzotic nature” with all the “untouched” jungles and mountains. The region is identified with the “nature” inasmuch that it is treated as if Black Sea possesses the last remains of the nature. This perception of ‘nature’ is highly popular nowadays endorsed by the tourism sector and recent movies shot in Black Sea with fascinating landscapes. On the other hand, the nature is “touched” by hydroelectric power plants and massive motorways in the region putting on the agenda of ecologists primarily.

³³⁵ Martin Stokes, “Istanbul Between Global and Local’ in Sounding Out”, *The Culture Industries and Globalization of Istanbul*, Ed. Çağlar Keyder, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc, 1999, p. 121

or by insiders themselves. In the end, it appears that the Laz/Black Sea stereotype has been taken for granted as a characteristic of personality identified with the nature of the Black Sea region.

Why are we so passionate about freedom, did we inherit the excitement in our breasts from the striking flow of the river in the Kaçkar mountains? (...) Lets drive our hearts towards the harsh waves of the sea....³³⁶

This mystification is usually instrumentalized in a positive way, in order to distinguish Lazness by flattering their courage, diligence, etc.

I was just about to go on stage for a concert, they announced me in a way that totally puzzled me. Was it me whom they were announcing? I said to myself. ‘He is the rebellious guy from the savage Black Sea forest...’³³⁷

I have also experienced similar announcements before our concerts with *Dalepe Nena* particularly referring to the ‘savageness’ of Black Sea and its people.³³⁸ Somehow, the survival skills of the Laz are flattered as if surviving in other parts of Anatolia were easier.³³⁹ I would like to attract the attention to the fact that, once the so-called ‘Black Sea people’s positively-charged ‘violent nature’ is taken for granted; the next step, it is to legitimize the ‘violence’ that is attached with it. And when this naturalization process conjoins with the reactionist ‘nationalism’ the horrible incidents are inevitable as it was

³³⁶ “Özgürlük düşüne neden sevdalandı yüreğimiz böylesine? Kaçkar dağlarında gürül gürül kayalara vuran çağlayanlardan mı aldık göğüs kafeslerimizdeki bastırılmaz heyecanı? (...) Yüreklerimizi özgürlük denizinin sert dalgalarına sürelim.” Zuğaşi Berepe, Va Mişkunan album cover, 1995, Anadolu Müzik

³³⁷ “Bir gün bir konserde tam sahneye çıkacağım, beni anons ediyorlar içerde neye uğradığımı şaşırđım. ‘Vahşi Karadeniz dağlarının asi çocuđu.’ Dedim, benden mi bahsediyorlar ya kendi kendime!” The interview with the Laz musician Birol Topalođlu, 28.4.2010, Balat

³³⁸ ‘Karadeniz’in hırçın dalgası gibi...’

³³⁹ Similarly, Volkan Konak was announced as “the arisen voice from the highlands of The Black Sea” when he was the guest of Beyaz Show, Kanal D, 21 March 2009

the case of the murders of Hrant Dink and Priest Santoro in 2007. Even such horrible incidents as these did not cause a decrease in the popularity of the Black Sea identity, as it is once again obvious that those two representations (nationalist and Black Sea/Laz) are still rather compatible nowadays.

As an outcome of the mystified, positively charged Black Sea representation, particularly in the last five years, as soon as I mention my Laz origin, I frequently receive the comment of “how nice, I like people from the Black Sea a lot!” especially within the Turkish community. Furthermore, I can observe a considerable ‘tolerance’ of the public towards the cultural performances of the Laz or Black Sea origin in the public sphere.³⁴⁰ Even though I came across with a few prejudices assuming that I might be a Turkish nationalist, my Lazness has been mostly welcomed by the Kurds I have met as soon as I articulated myself.³⁴¹

I could observe this change in a very short period of time also within my own family. Even though my nineteen year old brother had no concern with the Laz culture five years ago, nowadays he listens to Laz music, learned to dance *horon*, even memorized a few Laz sentences because of his friends’ increasing interest in Laz culture. One of his friends, originating from Trabzon but born in Istanbul, was even keen on learning the Laz language. Apparently, being from Black Sea is not exotic enough nowadays, so people are turning to Lazness.

³⁴⁰ To elaborate the term ‘tolerance’, let me speculate. I am suspicious if a group of Kurdish youth would be tolerated that much if they would dance *halay* by the Kadıköy ferry every Sunday for hours.

³⁴¹ When we worked with some Kurdish associations for the festival organization, I felt as if this collaboration whitened their ‘blackness’ and meanwhile darkened my ‘whiteness’. I use those colors as a metaphor of the position of marginality in the society.

Even though Lazness is growing in prominence, the Black Sea identity was reified as an outcome. So, we come back to the starting point of the Laz stereotype, where Blackens camouflages the cultural differences of the Black Sea region. Despite the fact that Laz identity did not detach itself from Turkish identity yet as a matter of being majority or minority, we can say that the Black Sea identity has been deconstructed in some ways. People have come to understand that the Laz language is not a ‘distorted’ Turkish accent and similarly the multicultural structure of Eastern Black Sea region has been increasingly unveiled while the name Laz was camouflaging the Georgians, Hemşins and Pontic Greeks as well as the Laz themselves in the past. Even though it sounds good at the first glance, this removal causes many identity conflicts like the discussions about the ‘true’ ethnic origins particularly in the region and the diaspora as well.

When Lazness was deconstructed, the ethnic groups of conversion who were living comfortably under the umbrella of ‘Laz’ began to live significant identity problems about origin, etc. I propose my argument particularly through my experience of the festival organization in Hemşin region in 2008. When we decided to set up the festival site in Hemşin region, in order to disperse the ‘Laz nationalism’ stigma, we faced with unbelievable conspiracy theories claiming that we had intentions to revitalize the Armenian cultural roots in the region due to our connections with a U.S.A. originated sponsor. The gossip became tragicomic, claiming that we were organizing baptism rituals in the river after the conservative, nationalist newspaper Yeniçağ’s headline: “*Festival Kisvesi Altında Ermenicilik*”³⁴²

³⁴² “*Armenian Propaganda Under the Camouflage of Festival*” Yeniçağ, 24 July 2008

Nikos Mihailidis thinks in the same way. He has been researching the *kemençe* in Trabzon for his postgraduate thesis. He says when it was revealed that they (dwellers of Trabzon) were not ‘Laz’ any longer, they had to face with the question of ‘who am I?’ He furthers his observation as “it is now impossible to deny the cultural origins with the Greeks owing to the Internet and the travels to Greece. You must see the web sites having tough discussions about the *kemençe* shows in Youtube from both sides.”³⁴³

“This is not a Rebel Song”

While exploring a musical genre, I believe one should investigate the unpopular, infamous aspects besides the mainstream aspects where I call this sphere simply as ‘periphery’. To put it in other words, I would like to expose the facts and the actors who swim against the tide of the Black Sea Rock Music.

For example, even though the musician Erdal Bayrakoğlu can be considered within this genre with the repertoire and musical structure, he believes he does not fit in the norms of the genre. In his own words:

The profile of my audience is by majority the Kurds and Alevis not the Laz though.(...) Even though I didn’t receive any critique (from the Laz), but a lot of speculation(...)People like me actually, they find me sincere except the Laz. It is so sad but I cannot go to Lazona to give concerts but only a few times. I guess it is because I go to the ‘East’ quite often, in addition to that I don’t act like ‘an artist’. (...)Maybe because they find me too ‘political’.(...) I am frequently invited by student organizations, unions. I am able to contact with the leftist media however neither the Black Sea media nor the national (mainstream). As Kazım Koyuncu was political too, he

³⁴³ Interview with Nikos Mihailidis, June, 2009

experienced the same reactions until the *Glbeyaz* soap opera. People don't posit you as an artist unless you become famous. They don't desire to see someone they can reach rather someone they cannot reach.³⁴⁴

At this point, I would like to emphasize the effect of 'circularity' once more. The more a cultural material or a performer circulates, the more aura it gains. Also, we can see one more time, the marginal stance taken when Lazness is attached to Kurdish identity. Additionally, as the Laz have a general tendency of staying away from 'marginality' at the expense of stabilizing the middle class, dominant position they appreciate almost no one unless he/she becomes unmarked and popular.

I will consider some musicians at the periphery of this musical genre. The ones I define as the 'others' in this musical production are Birol Topalođlu, Vova and *Dalepe Nena*, Helesa and Ayşenur Kolivar. They are not in entirely this musical genre, not because the lack of hard rock sound in their music but because the way they construct the cultural identity outside of the dominant discourse. However, the details placing them in marginal positions vary.

For example, apart from Vova, all of these musicians include Pontic Greek songs in their repertoires. As I mentioned earlier, the Pontic Greek identity still risks calling forth the conventional conspiracy theories that emerged from the nationalist discourse.

³⁴⁴ "Dinleyicilerim arasında çođunluđu Krtler ve Aleviler oluřturuyor.(...) Hiç eleřtiri gelmedi (Lazlardan) sadece karalama kampanyaları yapıldı. (...) İnsanlar beni seviyorlar, onlara sıcak, samimi geliyorum. Lazlar haricinde. Çok acı bir şey ama ben Lazona'da konsere gidemiyorum bir kaç sefer dıřında. Sanırım dođuya çok sık gittiđim için. Beni biraz daha siyasi görüyorlar. Bir de pek sanatçı gibi davranmıyorum. (...)Öđrenci grupları sık sık çağırırlar beni, sendikalar. Sol kanallara kolayca çıkıyorum ama Karadeniz kanallarına, ulusal kanallara pek çıkamıyorum. Kazım Koyuncu da *Glbeyaz* dizisine kadar tepki aldı. İnsanlar popüler olana kadar sanatçı olarak kabul etmiyorlar seni. Ulařabildikleri birini deđil ulařamadıkları kiři istiyorlar." Interview with Erdal Bayrakođlu, from the archive of Ayşenur Kolivar, 19 May 2009, İstanbul

On the other hand, Vova performs only in the Hemşin language, an Armenian dialect, which is enough to be marginalized in Turkey's context.

Secondly, they do not attach Turkishness beside the Laz/Hemşin/Black Sea identity but rather construct it as a subaltern group, suffered from the assimilation policies of the state similar to the Kurds, Armenians, Greeks, Jews etc. Birol Topaloğlu tells how it is difficult to convince the *destan* singers from Laz region to perform in Diyarbakır with the Dengbejs (Kurdish epic singers) on the same stage. Being on the same stage with dengbejs was a highly marginal act for them as because it means treating Lazness as equal to Kurdishness.

Performing in Newroz Celebrations,³⁴⁵ singing a Kurdish song with *kemençe* can also be considered in a similar way. Performing for the Kurds can be a reason for marginalization on its own. In my band, a few members decided to leave the group when we were invited to perform, and the majority of the group decided to participate, in a festival in Mardin in 2005.

An event organizer who is known for organizing the Black Sea events like festivals, concerts etc. was once confident about his advice for Birol Topaloğlu in his absence, saying “I cannot possibly understand how such a good musician can be involved in such good things and still not be popular! He has a very ‘marginal’ impression but we can actually blow up his popularity by, for example, making an interview for a magazine with a Turkish flag behind.”

Furthermore, I can tell that those musicians do not hesitate to express their objection to nationalist acts at the expense of being marginalized. It is interesting to see

³⁴⁵ In Kazlıçeşme, Istanbul, in March 2010.

all those names condemning İsmail Türüt's racist song for Hrant Dink's case.³⁴⁶ Let me give another example, when Ayşenur Kolivar expressed her opinions about the assimilation policies of the nation state in a panel in METU, she received rather aggressive reactions.³⁴⁷ In another case, she was subject to conspiracy theories when she was researching about dialects and languages in Black Sea.

Thirdly, they resist the music industry in some ways. For example, Birol Topaloğlu launches compilation albums (as well as his more popular solo albums) without making complicated arrangements. *Dalepe Nena* performs *destans*, and a capella (without instrument only human voice) songs, while Vova resists performing in faster bits.

Moreover, resisting the male dominance in the cultural production can also be another marginalization fact as *Dalepe Nena*, Ayşenur Kolivar and other woman musicians suffered in this business. The environment rarely encourages women to perform on instruments. Instead, they were positioned as vocals typically. As in my band, most of our members play as well as sing, we frequently come across tolerance regarding our musical deficiency assuming that it is natural for women. Similarly, when we do sound-checks we always receive little attention by the technical personnel compared with other male musicians. Moreover, we observe a kind of interference from male musicians as well as the audience.

³⁴⁶ Hikmet Akçiçek, Birol Topaloğlu, Ayşenur Kolivar, Nilüfer Taşkın, "Yasini Tersinden Okumak" in *Birikim Dergisi*, 21 June 2007

³⁴⁷ A seminar on 'Black Sea Music' organized by the Turkish Folklore Studies (THBT) in METU, Ankara, 8 December 2006

All these points should not be interpreted as if the above musicians are purely marginal though. On the contrary, their music and actions might be pretty much appropriate with the popular genre as they take place in popular projects and media from time to time. For example, Birol Topaloğlu just launched a new album from all Black Sea languages in an ‘entertaining’ musical form.³⁴⁸ Ayşenur Kolivar took stage in the project of Demir Demirkan called ‘Biriz’³⁴⁹ as an example of mosaics multicultural discourse. *Dalepe Nena*, on the other hand, always includes a few *horon* songs in their repertoire according to the audience’s expectations.

In traditional sociological wisdom, the prognosis regarding popular music's ability to tackle political issues is poor already. For Adorno in particular, and the Frankfurt School in general, “‘popular music’ like the rest of the ‘cultural industry’ suppresses and smothers political thought and cannot be progressive.”³⁵⁰ Their contemporary Walter Benjamin argued a more positive case, “seeing in the new technologies of mass production and mass dissemination creative possibilities for artists and cultural workers”.³⁵¹ The term ‘popular music’ is used here to connote “genres

³⁴⁸ KİYİ Boyu Karadeniz, Colchis Music, 2011

³⁴⁹ Biriz, EU funded project, 6 November, 2010, Lütfü Kırdar Congressional Hall.

³⁵⁰ T. Adorno, ‘On Popular Music’, *Studies in Philosophy and Social Science*, Institute of Social Research, New York, 1941; S. Frith and A. Goodwin (eds), *On Record: Rock, Pop and the Written Word*, London, Routledge, 1990, p. 301-14 cited in Bill Rolston, “This is not a Rebel Song”: The Irish Conflict and Popular Music, *Race Class* 2001, p. 50

³⁵¹ Walter Benjamin, *Illuminationen*, Frankfurt, 1961/R; Eng. trans., 1968/R, ed. H. Arendt, cited in ‘*Sociology of Music*’
www.oxfordmusiconline.com/divit.library.itu.edu.tr:80/subscriber/article/grove/music/26085

whose styles have evolved in an inextricable relationship with their dissemination via the mass media and their marketing and sale on a mass-commodity basis”.³⁵²

Taking Kazım Koyuncu as their model, all of these bands associate their music with ‘rock’ and claim the popular philosophy of rock music. In ‘the Sociology of Rock’, Frith argues that “while ‘pop’ music, chart orientated and acquiescing in the conditions of its own commercial production, was relevant to youth culture and subcultures in the formation of their identities, it was rock music, judged as authentic and as carrying a critique of its own conditions of production, that more directly served the oppositional stances of many youth subcultures.”³⁵³ In a similar vein, Bill Rolston says, “rock is said to be rooted in rebellion and freedom. It is imbued with the myth of authenticity; the singer means what s/he says and will never sell out to the culture industry. Rock is music with something to say. Pop, on the other hand, supposedly centers solely around pleasure, in particular the pleasure of romantic (usually heterosexual) love. Pop is inevitably commercial, its lyrics containing no deep message.”³⁵⁴ Even though ‘rock’ music has the same connotations in Turkey, the ‘oppositional stances’ of the rock music performers are rather contestable considering the fact that many of them have a popular, moderate, and even nationalist discourse.

³⁵² ‘Popular World Music’ <http://0-www.oxfordmusiconline.com.divit.library.itu.edu.tr:80/subscriber/article/grove/music/43179pg2>

³⁵³ S. Frith, *Sound Effects: Youth, Leisure and the Politics of Rock 'n' Roll*, New York : Constable, 1983, cited in ‘*Sociology of Music*’ www.oxfordmusiconline.com.divit.library.itu.edu.tr:80/subscriber/article/grove/music/26085

³⁵⁴ Bill Rolston, “This is not a Rebel Song”: The Irish Conflict and Popular Music, *Race Class*, 2001, p. 54-55

In terms of articulating and celebrating political aspirations and causes, I find *Zuğışı Berepe* quite authentic compared with ‘softer’ discourses that emerged with Kazım Koyuncu’s solo albums and the following Laz rock bands. The antagonistic position of *Zuğışı Berepe* mainly derived from their Laz lyrics apart from a few Turkish and a Hemşin, emphasizing the assimilation of the language³⁵⁵, the future of the Laz culture, the injustice life conditions of the Laz women³⁵⁶, the oppression and revolution³⁵⁷. Even though the messages that came out of from the lyrics were more individualistic in the second album, the hard rock sound was more in prominence. Consequently they were popular only within a limited environment: politically opponent university youth.

On the other hand, first of all, Kazım Koyuncu’s solo albums and the other bands’ music is addressing to a wider audience with the ‘ethnic’ ingredients. The theme

³⁵⁵ We don’t know/ What to say now/ We don’t know how the future will be for us/ What we will say to the future/ We know we will sing on the way/ The brides will give birth to our kids/ Our kids will sing songs/ Our language will not die, will not die/ We don’t know what to say to the future/ We don’t know/ We are afraid/ Our old women die/ And *kukumboli* do not exist anymore/ We don’t know/ ‘Vamişkunan’ (We don’t know), Vamişkunan ,1993, Anadolu Müzik

³⁵⁶ “Now it is time for the tea collecting my aunty/ You will suffer from backache again/You will wait for the tea money/ Your husband is an idle who is wandering around/All work is waiting for you/ household, the barndhold, the kids/You work without break my aunty/Get into the factories aunty/ Make your husband help you/ The raise on the expenditures devastates you/ Your money becomes a leaf/ You never smile from heart as you never did/ One day you will relieve from all these/ We will do it together my aunty/ A world like a sun/ All the days pass with trouble/ Your children grow up/ Your mum spoke Laz to you/ You do it with your kids too/ Our language is dying my aunty/ You teach it to your kids/ Language is a mother/ When the language dies the mother dies/ Give a hand let’s cherish our language/ Don’t leave it to die my aunty “ ‘Dadişkimi’ (My Aunty) Zuğışı Berepe, İğzas, 1998, Ada Müzik

³⁵⁷ They step on our bodies with their foots every day/ They cut off our ways/ They cut off our breaths/ I can see the world dies every morning/ Can we not do anything/ Will it be like that all the time/ Stand up/ Knock down/ Come together for demolition/We will have power to crash all these down/ You will be brave/ You live as you want/ You will think sometimes what life is/ You will be indifferent sometimes/ You will live for freedom and love ‘Oxoskva Do Oropa Şeni’,(For Freedom and Love) 1993, Anadolu Müzik

‘tradition’ somehow disabled any affinity with the politics as almost all the songs were about ‘love’ or ‘nature’.³⁵⁸ Secondly, instead of tackling with the identity politics, the latter rather embraced the mission of ‘environmentalism’. As the ‘nature’ has been associated with ‘Black Sea’ in a fetishistic way as if ‘nature’ exist only in ‘Black Sea’, the popular ‘rebellion’ badge of rock music was highly compatible with the Laz stereotype and frequently manipulated by the young Laz musicians:

Black Sea people are passionate, rebellious, outspoken and the music they produce would inevitably have similar characteristics.³⁵⁹

The nature of Black Sea is obvious, it is harsh, the roads are steep, the sea is peevish, the mountains are very high and rough. The first impression (of this nature) is to ‘take the rock music and ornament it within this nature’. When we consider the Black Sea person, he/she is compatible with this music too. The important thing is to be able to tell something to the people more than the musical style.³⁶⁰

In the last couple of years, the Laz and Black Sea people are playing leading roles in the environmentalist movements in Turkey. Thus, the ‘ecology’ concept enabled the Laz to cooperate with other ecologist movements as it is very likely to see a Laz

³⁵⁸ Kazım Koyuncu once said that “the song ‘Domivamis’ (When it’s run out) is the only song that has a social context as far as I and my friends came across. It tells about the scarcity and its devastating states, thus this song is quite important for us. “*Ve bu (Domivamis’) şarkı benim ve arkadaşlarımın rastlayabildiği tek toplumsal içerikli şarkı. İçinde yokluktan ve bu durumun yarattığı sıkıntıdan söz ediyor. Genelde Laz ezgilerinde aşk ve doğa yer alır. Bu yüzden bu şarkının anlamı çok önemli.*” ‘Viya: Müsekkin Niyetine...’ Aslı Atasoy, Radikal Gazetesi - 28 Ağustos 2001

³⁵⁹ “*Karadenizliler tutkulu, hırçın, söz dinlemez, asi, sözünü esirgemeyen bir yapıya sahiptir, bu yapıya sahip insanların ürettikleri müzik de aynı özellikleri taşıyacaktır.*” Korhan Özyıldız, the vocal of Marsis, “Adı Yok Kendisi Var, Rock, Folk, Etnik”, Evrim Kepenek, Birgün, 31 August 2008

³⁶⁰ “*Karadeniz’in doğası bellidir. Sert bir doğası var, örneğin yolları sarp, denizi çok asi ve hırçın, dağları çok yüksek ve engebeldir. İşte insanın aklına direk gelen düşünce ‘rock müziği al ve bu tabiatın içinde motifle’. Karadeniz insanını da düşünürsek o da bu müzikle uyumlu. Zaten önemli olan yaptığın müziğin tarzından çok, insanlara bir şeyleri anlatabilmek.*” Volkan Cebeci, the Vocal of Nena, “Adı Yok Kendisi Var, Rock, Folk, Etnik”, Evrim Kepenek, Birgün, 31 August 2008

band as well as the participants in the demonstration events. However, I witnessed the controversy on the notions of culture and ecology in some of those ecological movements.³⁶¹ For example, on the eve of a demonstration towards the hydroelectric power plants (*HES*) planning to be constructed in Black Sea, when some people offered to carry banners written in Black Sea languages, the offer met with a repulse claiming that “those banners might horrify some (nationalist) people as the ecology is more important than culture”.

The affinity with ecology at this context recalls Žižek’s argument as interpreting the ecology ‘as a new opium for the masses’:

When politics is reduced to the "private" domain, it takes the form of the politics of FEAR - fear of losing one's particular identity, of being overwhelmed. (...) That is to say, with the depoliticized, socially objective, expert administration and coordination of interests as the zero-level of politics, the only way to introduce passion into this field, to actively mobilize people, is through fear, a basic constituent of today's subjectivity. (...) This ecology of fear has all the chances of developing into the predominant form of ideology of global capitalism, a new opium for the masses replacing the declining religion: it takes over the old religion's fundamental function, that of putting on an unquestionable authority which can impose limits. (...) It is this distrust which makes ecology the ideal candidate for hegemonic ideology, since it echoes the anti-totalitarian post-political distrust of large collective acts. (...) And this brings us back to the notion of ecology as the new opium for the masses; the underlying message is again a deeply conservative one - any change can only be the change for the worst.³⁶²

Žižek’s arguments enabled me to interpret why those musicians and their fans are that involved in the ecology issue. This involvement is obviously related to the

³⁶¹ *Karadeniz İsyandadır Hareketi*

³⁶² Slavoj Žižek, “Censorship Today: Violence, or Ecology as a New Opium for the Masses”, Lecture in the Tilton Gallery (NYC), November 2007

identity politics, as the former provides a secure sphere in which to be antagonistic while such a discourse “in our exploitation of natural resources, we are borrowing from the future, so one should treat our Earth with respect, as something ultimately Sacred, something that should not be unveiled totally, that should and will forever remain a Mystery, a power we should trust, not dominate” is almost ‘universally’ taken for granted. To put it other in other words, it is easier to believe the future will be worse than now thanks to environmental exploitation than to believe that there is something to be done to make the world fair than now. Thus, considering the fact that identity politics is still forming a hot debate in Turkey, ecological opposition is easier to adapt. However, I do not want to underestimate the ecological opposition as it may evolve into a highly radical standing of opposition in the future.

Even though the ‘denial’ of the different ethnic groups apart from Turks has lost its legitimacy, despite a few singular inefficient attempts, there is no legal background to secure the means of productions for ethnic groups yet. I don’t think that it is necessary the state to provide those means (like TV channel run by the state- TRT Şeş) but at least it has to change its constitution to provide all the citizens feel free to express themselves without getting marked and equal with each other.

In short, I would like to emphasize how a musical genre is associated with politics when it is attached with the concept of ‘identity’. As every musical genre constructs a new world and is comprised of a particular historical and geographical experience,³⁶³ from repertoire to its instruments, the narrative discourses to the events

³⁶³ Martin Stokes, ‘Istanbul Between Global and Local’ in *Sounding Out, The Culture Industries and Globalization of İstanbul*, Ed. Çağlar Keyder, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc, 1999

involved, all those facts are part of this experience which helps in the investigation of the political boundaries. When I evaluated those performances in this totality, despite the innovative and authentic aspects, I do not agree with those who believe that they are ‘rebellious.’³⁶⁴

³⁶⁴ Bill Rolston who inspired me to decide the name of my thesis at the very last moment, is also portraying a similar context about the music bands who are either reluctant or getting marginal to “touch the issue of the ‘troubles’ in the North of Ireland”. He says “along with the superficial treatment of the subject in a number of songs, would seem to confirm the impression that popular music is quite inept when it comes to such major political themes.” Bill Rolston, “This is not a Rebel Song”: The Irish Conflict and Popular Music, *Race Class*, 2001, p. 64

CHAPTER V: CONCLUSION

In this thesis, my purpose is to evaluate the cultural performances of the Laz that have emerged in the urban public sphere in the 2000s. Simply, I interpret those performances as a response to the repercussions of the cultural policies which were realized through the ‘modernization project’ in Turkey. I also question these performances whether they contribute to challenge identity politics in Turkey.

In the first chapter, I attempted to expose the economic and social conditions that shaped the contemporary Laz identity. In this context, I discussed that tea farming and cultural policies in line with the modernization project which positioned the Laz within the hegemonic discourse as ‘loyal citizens’ to the state.

I suggest that transforming from lower class peasants to the middle class positions by tea farming, the Laz were quite privileged which, then, engendered the ‘domestication of the state’ in the Laz region. On the other hand, the modernization project was constructed on a dichotomy between the modern/urban and the local/traditional. The superiority of the first implied the abandonment of the local / traditional values as a condition of benefiting the boons of modern life. Thus, I evaluate these two main facts discouraging the Laz articulating their cultural ‘difference’ in the public sphere. On the contrary, they were rather inclined to emphasize the cultural ‘similarity’ as they voluntarily internalized the assimilation policies.³⁶⁵

³⁶⁵ Leyla Neyzi portrays a similar stance about the Alevis in Turkey “the generation of Alevis raised in the early Republican period tended to embrace an assimilationist stance as a way of ensuring upward mobility and cultural acceptance of community members in the public sphere.” Leyla Neyzi, “Embodied Elders: Space and Subjectivity in the Music of Metin-Kemal Kahraman”, *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 38, No. 1, 2002, p. 92

When we come to the 1990s, the nationalist cultural policies of the state have been increasingly challenged concurrent with globalization, the Kurdish Political Movement, etc. Like other ethnic groups in Turkey, some Laz intellectuals emerged to criticize the assimilationist policies and demanded a new space for a new representation of their cultural identity by replacing the popular stereotypes.

In the second chapter, I tried to evaluate those intellectuals' productions as an effort to construct a new Laz identity. While doing so, I found those three concepts foundational: history, language and culture. The mutual discourse that came out from those productions was to modernize the Laz culture through literacy while dispersing the pejorative connotations of 'Lazness'. On the other hand, as the Laz identity was strongly attached with the 'past' and 'village' as an outcome of the cultural policies, those intellectuals attempted to reconstruct it in line with 'the modern and urban' as they were all urban dwellers.

However, the so-called Laz Cultural Movement has not turned into a mass movement as their visions and expectations about Lazness have not met with 'their' 'people.' Thus, they were rather marginalized while managing to circulate their productions among the members of an educated minority. First of all, as a middle class community the Laz people did not intend to be marginalized and stigmatized like Kurds, Armenians and Greeks, etc. who claim that they were subject to bare oppression by the state. Thus, they did not also want to be recognized as 'oppressed' even though they suffered from 'invisibility' and misrepresentation in the public sphere.

One of the arguments that I developed through this thesis is that, the Laz identity has been reconstituted in parallel with the 'Kurdish identity' in the last decade. As the two communities share similar characteristics of Islam, bilingualism and agriculturalism,

and sedentary position in Anatolia, the Laz made the most of it to differentiate themselves from the Kurds to preserve their privileged middle class position.

When we come to the 2000s, the Laz met with a new way of representation in the public sphere: popular music. Despite the earlier presentations of Laz music by various musicians, Lazness is particularly highlighted with music by the fame of Kazım Koyuncu. In the third chapter, I tried to analyze the facts that have transformed Kazım Koyuncu into a phenomenon. In this respect, I discussed that his music was considerably influential for the masses as he was conjoining the concept of tradition and modernity at the same time, since people suffered from this dichotomy consciously or unconsciously so far. I argue that his Lazness was offering a ‘moderate’ and ‘marketable’ ethnic identity which then turned into a genre called ‘Black Sea Rock’ after his death. While the Laz identity was considered as an entity to be abandoned before, it has turned into a ‘desired’ one nowadays in the urban context, particularly for the second generation of Laz migrants.

What I intended to display was that Lazness is only acceptable when it is associated with popular culture, market, and entertainment business. I interpreted this stance as a signifier of the hegemonic discourse that recognizes the ethnic groups as long as they do not demand cultural rights (like education in mother language) or push for facing the oppressive history, etc. but just performing songs ‘peacefully’. One of the main purposes of this thesis is to criticize this hegemonic discourse which positions the Laz and Kurds with Armenians, etc. in opposite poles. This opposition obviously marks the Laz as the ‘acceptable’ citizens while marking the ‘others’ as ‘Others’. Thus, we can say that there is a new scaling within the society endorsed by the hegemonic discourse. And the Laz are positioning (themselves) as ‘entertainers of the nation’ through music

and dance similar to the earlier Laz jokes. The tolerance and consumption of those music and dance performances in the public sphere demonstrates that this hegemonic perception of the ethnic identities is shared not only by the state but also by the majority of the people in urban settings.

As the performance theory has been a significant frame for my argumentations in my study, I tried to present the potential of the performances to mark or change the cultural identity. However, I interpret the expanding visibility of Lazness in the public sphere not much efficacious for example on the flourishing of Laz language despite the great interest on it. Simply speaking, Laz is not considered as a negative marker³⁶⁶ anymore as long as it is performed through a musical form, but still there is no sufficient infrastructure for reproduction of the language itself.

Elaborating on the contemporary Laz identity from a larger perspective including the economic background, intellectuals' perspectives, and the performances were rather challenging. However, the limited nature of the academic studies in this field has probably disabled me to go through some of those subjects. Thus, those subjects deserve to be endorsed by a deep ethnographic study in the future as this text is constituted strongly around my own subjectivity.

Through this thesis, I hope to contribute to a critical reflection on the identity politics in Turkey by demonstrating the modernization experiences of the Laz as a minority group who positioned themselves within the hegemonic discourse in general.

³⁶⁶ "Laz language is much better than a decade ago. Because the youth do not ashamed of Laz language as it was the case earlier." *"Lazca şimdi 10 sene öncesinden daha iyi durumda. Artık gençler Lazcadan utanmıyor çünkü; önceden böyle bir durum vardı."* Ercan Çelik *"Koyuncu'dan Horona Davet"*, Radikal, 4 April 2004

Even though I portrayed a pessimistic panorama, I still believe in the transformative potential of those performances. Mehmedali Barış Beşli, once told how, as *Zuğışı Berepe*, they were afraid of being ‘shot’ on the way from their first concert in Pazar.³⁶⁷ They were not shot, but I believe that we will not be able to live peacefully in this country unless Ciwan Haco³⁶⁸ performs in *Lazona* without the fear of getting ‘shot’.

³⁶⁷ Asi Yürek Kazım Koyuncu <http://www.yuksekovahaber.com/haber/asi-yurek-kazim-koyuncu--32743.htm>

³⁶⁸ Famous Kurdish rock musician

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