

Who Are the Laz? Cultural Identity and the Musical Public Sphere on the Turkish Black Sea Coast

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Who Are the Laz? Cultural Identity and the Musical Public Sphere on the Turkish Black Sea Coast¹

Thomas Solomon

Abstract

This article discusses contrasting musical performances of identity on the eastern Black Sea coast of northern Turkey. This region is home to an ethnolinguistic group known as the Laz, but the term Laz is also used in a much broader sense in Turkey to refer to people from the entire Black Sea coast of Anatolia. Unflattering stereotypes abound in Turkish popular culture about Black Sea coastal dwellers, and a genre of Turkish popular music known as “Laz pop” plays extensively on these stereotypes. Since the 1980s a Laz cultural movement has sought to reclaim Laz identity through revitalizing traditional Laz culture, language and music. The article identifies three musical approaches to reconstructing Laz identity: cosmopolitan youth, back to roots and neo-traditional. All these musical ways of performing Laz identity are in dialogue with each other, forming a musical public sphere in which Lazness is negotiated not just through rational discourse in language, but also through performative gestures mediated through commercial recordings and videos.

In this article I discuss contrasting discursive representations and musical performances of identity on the eastern Black Sea coast of northern Turkey. This region is home to an ethnolinguistic group known as the *Laz*. But the ethnonym *Laz* is also used in a much broader sense in Turkey to refer to people from the entire Black Sea coast of Anatolia, which stretches nearly 1500 kilometers from the Bosphorus Strait in northwest Turkey to the border with Georgia in the east. Vastly different ways of musically performing *Laz* identity co-exist in the contemporary Turkish mediascape, ranging from racialised stereotypes of the *Laz* as comical buffoon to thoughtful, guitar-wielding troubadours. These contrasting versions of “*Lazness*” are effectively in dialogue with each other, constituting a kind of musical public sphere that provides a multitude of competing “*Laz*” subject positions that listeners may inhabit or position themselves in relation to. I suggest that much of the dialogue about *Laz* cultural identity occurs primarily not through rational public discourse, as in the classic Habermasian model of the European bourgeois public sphere, but through a complex interaction of discursive representations and musically embodied

performative gestures. Such embodied gestures may be textualised in the form of commercial multimedia products (e. g. CDs and cassettes, album art, music videos), but are also experienced by viewers and listeners as performative embodiments of identity (cf. Auslander 2004, 2006).

In *The Republic of Love: Cultural Intimacy in Turkish Popular Music*, Martin Stokes uses the metaphor of commercial recordings being “in conversation with each other” (2010:179) to talk about the ways that mass-mediated songs dialogically construct contrasting subject positions and competing sets of aesthetic and civic values related to Turkish national identity. Stokes thus describes a kind of musical public sphere where debates over and performances of Turkish identity are constructed and enacted through multimedia forms experienced affectively through the body. Stokes’ approach broadly informs my argument here about how competing imaginations of Lazness are affectively constructed and performed through musical means, creating a musical conversation about Laz identity.

I begin by summarising social scientific discussions of Laz identity in terms of both the specific Laz ethnolinguistic group and the broader concept of the Laz in Turkish popular culture. This leads into a discussion of so-called “Laz pop” as a genre in Turkish popular music. After a brief account of the Laz cultural movement, I then discuss various approaches to reconstituting Laz identity through music that reject popular cultural stereotypes of Black Sea coastal dwellers and offer more progressive versions of Laz identity based on Laz language, culture and history.

I first began to follow Black Sea music as a fan while living in Istanbul 1999–2002, where I attended concerts by some of the musicians discussed here, including Birol Topaloğlu and Fuat Saka. After I married into a Turkish family from Giresun on the Black Sea coast in 2002 and moved to Norway with my spouse in the same year, I continued pursuing an interest in Black Sea music and culture during annual trips to Turkey to visit family. While I have not done systematic, long-term fieldwork in the Black Sea coastal region, I have traveled there several times as a tourist or to attend conferences and used those opportunities also to attend musical performances, talk informally with musicians and other people there, and collect relevant material. My discussion here is thus based primarily on my readings of the recordings themselves as cultural texts, informed by a general knowledge of Black Sea music and culture built up over some 15 years. I have also drawn on secondary sources such as published interviews with the artists and other scholarly research on the region.

The Laz: Social Scientific Definitions

Social scientific work by anthropologists, historians and linguists on the Black Sea coast of northeastern Anatolia has provided detailed accounts of the peoples who live in the region. In this research, the Laz are described as a specific ethnolinguistic group with a long history in the region,² localised in the two provinces of Rize

and Artvin, beginning near the town of Pazar in the former and running northeast along the coast through the latter across the border with Georgia up to near the city of Batumi (fig. 1). This region roughly corresponds to the historical Ottoman *sanjak* (administrative division or subprovince) of Lazistan. Historically the Laz had been Christian during the Byzantine period, but converted to Islam during the Ottoman period (Meeker 2002).

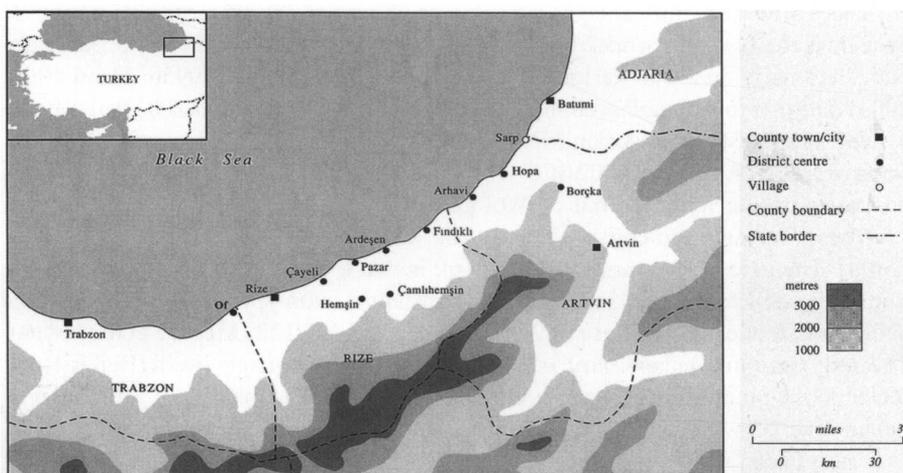


Fig. 1: Northeast Turkey and adjoining region of Georgia, homeland of speakers of the Laz language. (Courtesy of Chris Hann; used by permission.)

The single most important diagnostic characteristic for defining this group is the Laz language (known as *Lazuri* or *Lazuri Nena* in Laz itself, and as *Lazca* in Turkish). Lazuri belongs to the language family known as Kartvelian or South Caucasian. It is closely related to Mingrelian, which is spoken across the border in Georgia, and more distantly related to Georgian. Accounts differ on the extent to which the Lazuri spoken in Turkey and Mingrelian are mutually intelligible, with some suggesting that Lazuri and Mingrelian speakers understand each other easily (e.g. Andrews 2002:177; Topaloğlu & Yıldırım 2001:45), and that the two languages should actually be considered dialects of a single language, others saying they are about as close to each other as German and Dutch (Bellér-Hann 1995a:505, n. 9, citing Feurstein and Berdsena) and still others saying that while closely related, they are “not mutually inherently intelligible” (Ethnologue n.d.). It is difficult to say, because those who pronounce on the subject typically have a stake in the answer for ideological reasons.

There is no hard data on the current number of speakers of Lazuri; estimates range widely from 45,000 to 500,000 (Kutscher 2008:83). There are essentially no monolingual Lazuri speakers in Turkey, all of them being bilingual in Lazuri and

Turkish (Kutscher 2008:82). An unknown but probably sizeable number of Lazuri speakers live outside the historical Laz homeland as migrants or refugees in western Turkey (especially in the heavily industrialised provinces of Sakarya, Kocaeli, and Bolu)³ or in the diaspora in Germany.⁴ Linguist Silvia Kutscher considers Lazuri to be “a highly endangered language” (2008:99), and Lazuri (under the name “Laz”) is classified as “definitely endangered” in UNESCO’s Atlas of the World’s Languages in Danger (UNESCO n.d.).

The nature of historical and contemporary Laz identity has been the subject of extensive ethnographic work by anthropologists Ildikó Bellér-Hann and Chris Hann, published individually in various articles (Bellér-Hann 1995a, 1995b; Hann 1997, 2003) and in a jointly authored monograph (Bellér-Hann & Hann 2001), as well as by anthropologist and historian Michael Meeker (1971, 2002); this work is usefully summarised by Andrews (2002:176–8) and Benninghaus (2002). Linguistic research on Lazuri has been carried out by Wolfgang Feurstein and Gôichi Kojima, though I have not been able to consult directly any of their work, and by Sylvia Kutscher (2008). The general consensus of this work is that there is not a strong ethnic consciousness of Laz identity within the historically Lazuri-speaking area (Benninghaus 2002; Bellér-Hann & Hann 2001:222; Hann 1997:122; Meeker 2001:108–9). The only (minimal) marker of ethnicity is the Laz language itself (Bellér-Hann 1995a:498); otherwise the people consider themselves to be Turks and Muslims (Hann 1997).

The “Laz” in Turkish Popular Culture

Existing mostly outside social scientific definitions of Laz identity, a much broader concept of who is considered to be Laz can be found in Turkish popular culture. Here “Laz” refers not to a specific ethnolinguistic group inhabiting a few provinces in the far northeast of Turkey, but rather can designate people living along nearly the entire Black Sea coast eastward from Sinop (roughly on the midpoint of the Turkish coastline between the borders with Romania in the west and Georgia in the east), or even from Zonguldak on the northwest coast (Benninghaus 2002:497; Meeker 1971:321). Within this more generalised concept of Lazness, typically one does not consider oneself or one’s home community to be Laz, but rather it is the people in “the next valley over” to the east who are Laz. As Meeker explains in a passage often referenced in social scientific writing on the eastern Black Sea coast:

The Black Sea Turks themselves use the term “Laz,” but in a fashion somewhat different from the Anatolians. For example, the people of Ereğli, a town on the western Black Sea coast, do not accept that they themselves are Laz, nor do they consider as Laz all those people within and west of Zonguldak, the province in which Ereğli is located. They do refer to those people to the east of Zonguldak as Laz and believe that the customs of the latter are both inferior and different from their own. So it continues along the coast to the most eastern areas. The people of Of, a district east of Trebizond, do not consider themselves as Laz, but reserve this term for people east of Pazar,

who correspond closely, but not exactly, to the Lazi.⁵ Again, the people of Of believe that their immediate neighbors to the east and west have customs similar to their own, while those of the Laz are different and inferior. On the other hand, the people living west of Of and even descendants of Anatolians who settled in Of during the late nineteenth century frequently refer to the people of Of as Laz. (Meeker 1971:321; see also Meeker 2002:199, n. 30)

Popular stereotypes regarding the Laz in this more general sense are abundant, and the Black Sea coastal dweller is the subject of innumerable ethnic jokes focusing on the adventures of a male character known as “Laz Temel” and his wife Fadime. “Laz Temel” may at first seem to be dull-witted, but with his childlike simplicity he often unwittingly points out the foibles of others or of supposedly more sophisticated or elevated culture; he may thus embody elements of a trickster figure. He is quick-tempered and possessed by a restless energy (Meeker 2002:109), and he is enamored of guns and extremely trigger-happy (Meeker 1971:325). Laz men are said to be very macho and treat their women badly (Bellér-Hann 1995a:490); they are devout Muslims, and very narrow-minded in religious matters (Meeker 1971:325). They speak Turkish with what non-Black Sea coastal dwellers find to be a comical

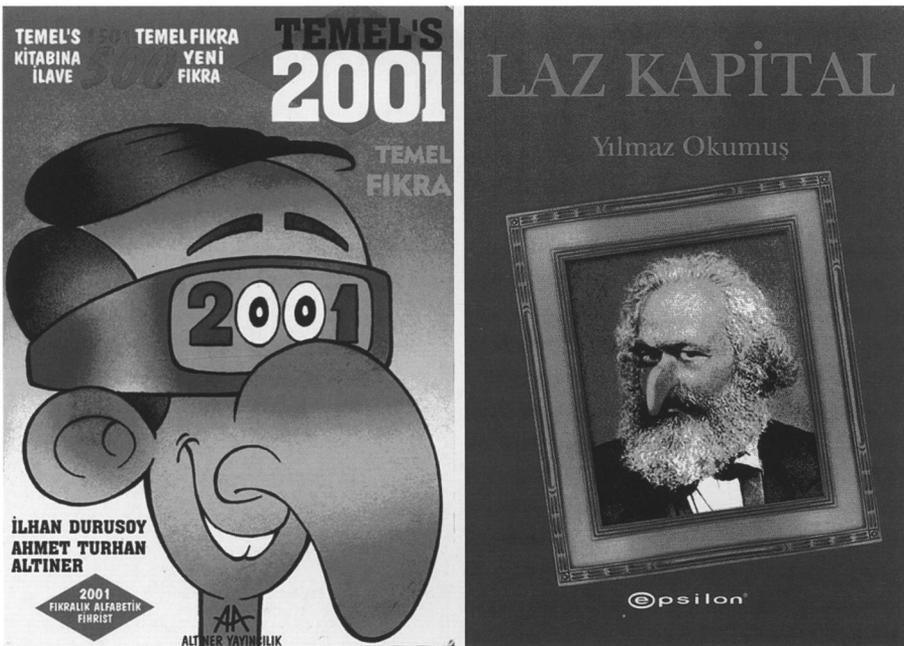


Fig. 2: Front covers of “Laz humour” books: a compilation of jokes (fikra) about the stereotyped Laz character “Temel” (Durusoy & Altiner 2001) and a satirical book using a written imitation of supposed Black Sea dialect throughout (Okumuş 2006). The covers of both books feature figures with exaggeratedly long noses, in the latter case a depiction of Karl Marx as a Laz.

accent, due to the fact that their dialect does not get “right” the vowel harmony of standard Turkish (Meeker 1971:323–4). These are cultural stereotypes of long standing; Meeker notes with regard to the eastern Black Sea coast, “the residents of the coastal region have more or less consistently had the reputation of hicks since the medieval period” (2002:97). The pervasive ethnic humour surrounding this popular notion of the Laz takes on racial overtones when the Laz are portrayed as having a specific recognisable phenotype, characterised by an extremely long nose, an aspect of their appearance inevitably exaggerated to grotesque proportions in cartoonish illustrations of Black Sea coastal people (fig. 2).⁶

There is also a whole genre of “Laz humour” largely based on imitating the way Black Sea people purportedly (mis)pronounce the Turkish language; it only takes an altered vowel or two to evoke Black Sea dialect and provoke hearty laughter when speaking within a group or referring to Black Sea people in a written text.⁷

Black Sea coastal dwellers also have a reputation for being especially musical and having a great fondness for their regional folk music and dance, the performance of which are central to festivities in the highland pastures (*yayla*) coastal dwellers may travel to during the summer months (Stokes 1993). The musical instrument primarily associated with the eastern Black Sea coast from Giresun to the Georgian border is the vertically held box fiddle *kemençe*, used to accompany various vocal genres, but especially associated with the very fast singing (in Black Sea dialect) in the genre known as *atma türkü*.⁸ The *kemençe* may also accompany the regional *horon* dance, performed by groups in a straight line or in a circle (fig. 3). The energetic, constant wriggling shoulder movements characteristic of the Black Sea *horon* are popularly said to be inspired by the movements of the small *hamsi* fish (anchovy), a staple of the coastal diet; these movements are also associated with the nervous energy said to be constantly exhibited by Black Sea coastal dwellers.

Another instrument used in northeastern Turkey is the *tulum* (bagpipe), which is often associated with another ethnic group in the region, the Hemşin.⁹ Performance on this instrument outside the eastern Black Sea coastal area was rare until fairly



Fig. 3: Kemençe player and horon dancers at a party in Istanbul hosted by people from the Black Sea town of Giresun, July 2002. (Stills captured from video shot by the author.)

recently, and the *tulum* has entered wider public consciousness in Turkey as an “ethnic” instrument associated with the region only since the 1990s (Bates 2016:99). Sometimes people attempt to make an ethnic distinction between the *kemençe* and the *tulum*, with the fiddle belonging to the Laz in the lower valleys closer to the coast



Fig. 4: “Laz” character from *Karagöz shadow puppet theatre* (author’s collection).

and the bagpipes being more typical of the Hemşin living in the higher valleys within the foothills of the Kaçkar Mountains above the coast. A definitive ethnic distinction between the instruments is untenable, however, since the two ethnic groups have lived in close proximity and shared aspects of material culture since at least the Byzantine period, with many villages both closer to the coast and higher up in the hills being in fact mixed communities (Hann 1997); members of villages that are mostly ethnically separated may share *yayla*, summer grazing lands higher up in the mountains, and participate together in summer festivities. In present-day practice, at least, both the *kemençe* and the *tulum*, as well as the *horon* dance, are largely shared between the Laz and the Hemşin (Öztürk 2014:92; Yılmaz 2006:265).

A “Laz” man (carrying a *kemençe* fiddle and wearing a costume associated with the Black Sea region during the Ottoman period) is one of the (many) stock ethnic characters of the Turkish shadow puppet theatre *Karagöz* (fig. 4). Scholar of Turkish theatre traditions Metin And notes that the character speaks with “a strong Black Sea coast accent,” “is very talkative and also speaks quickly,” and “has a habit of becoming very angry in a short period of time” (1979:73). Music and dance are an integral part of the Laz’s characterisation, as “He often dances on the stage a Black Sea dance called *horon*, which is characterised by alert, tense, shivering movements, the trembling of the entire body from head to foot, sudden sharp kneeling and springing up at the rebound” (1979:73).¹⁰ A similar ethnic Laz man is one of the stock characters of the Turkish folk theatre *Ortaoyunu* (Konur 1995:50).

“Laz Pop” as a Popular Music Genre

While there have been references to and portrayals of people from the Black Sea coast in popular music in Turkey since at least the 19th century, the musical genre sometimes referred to as “Laz pop” emerged during the late 1990s, fueled especially by Black Sea-themed radio stations broadcasting in urban areas and by music videos that combine the frenetic energy of traditional Black Sea music with images of (almost exclusively male) performers who in various ways inhabit or signify the stereotypes of Black Sea people described above.¹¹ In musical terms, “Laz pop” is a hybrid pop form that combines the folk music of the Black Sea coast (especially the fast-tempo singing of the *atma türkü* genre) with urban pop and dance music, sometimes also adding folk music from other regions of Anatolia and aspects of the Turkish popular music genre *arabesk* to the mix. While traditional Black Sea music was typically based on solo performances by a singer-instrumentalist who played *kemençe* or *tulum* to accompany dancing, or a duo of singer and *kemençe* player, “Laz pop” songs often have complex arrangements incorporating many different instruments; such arrangements were made possible by the expanded possibilities for multi-track recording in Istanbul recording studios since the 1990s. “Laz pop” songs are characterised by relatively fast tempos, often in asymmetrical metres (especially in the 5/8 and 7/8 of the regional *horon* dance),¹² the prominent sound of the *kemençe* fiddle, and fast singing in Black Sea dialect, often exaggerated for humourous effect. The song texts themselves, as well as images in music videos, may refer in a general way to the Black Sea region and regional culture. Anchoring the arrangement is a



Fig. 5: Covers of CDs by various “Laz pop” artists.

rhythm section of bass and (sampled) drums of the type ubiquitous in contemporary dance pop in Turkey, known generically in Turkish as *tekno* (techno).

The recording artists of “Laz pop” are mostly people from the Black Sea region, though they generally come from outside the specifically Laz-speaking areas near the border with Georgia. Among the well-known performers in the genre are İsmail Turut, Mustafa Topaloğlu, Tarık Tüfekçi, Kont Adnan, Davut Güloğlu and Recebim. Album cover art for “Laz pop” recordings often features the artist by the sea or in a boat, visually emphasising the connection between the music on the recording and Black Sea coastal geography (fig. 5).

The music and images of “Laz pop” typically draw on the cultural stereotypes about Black Sea people mentioned above, usually playing them straight, but often framing them ironically, and sometimes even engaging in broad self-parody for humourous effect. An example of the latter approach is the performer from Trabzon-Maçka who calls himself Kont Adnan (Count Adnan, with “count” meaning the nobility title). Kont Adnan’s persona is derived from the premise that the fast singing of melodies based on a small number of pitches within a limited range that is typical of some Black Sea music—a sort of highly rhythmic *Sprechstimme*, typical of the vocal genre known as *atma türkü*—is actually the origin of rap music. He thus dresses like a stereotypical hip hopper (baseball cap turned backwards, dark sun glasses, hoodie, baggy pants, gold chain jewelry, etc.) and effects some of the stereotypical mannerisms of a rapper, while singing in dialect in Black Sea style over musical arrangements that consistently highlight the *kemençe* fiddle. When appearing in public to perform or guesting on television talk shows, he always stays in character, combining hip-hop fashion and mannerisms with aspects of the “Laz Temel” figure, and insisting in interviews that his way of singing is actually the origin of rap. His videoclips, such as the one for his 2001 breakthrough hit “Kuş Foli Koma Foli,” also signify on hip-hop stereotypes, showing him for example riding in the back of a limousine with a girl sitting on each side of him while he declaims the song text in Black Sea vocal style; the clip also cuts between shots of breakdancers and a line of *horon* dancers.

A performer of “Laz pop” whose image and performance style are based on common stereotypes regarding the masculinity of Black Sea coastal men is Davut Güloğlu, originally from Rize. Güloğlu’s 2003 hit “Katula Katula” (onomatopoeia for the sound of mocking laughter) was one of the bestsellers in Turkey during that year, and it influenced the trend in “Laz pop” toward so-called “techno” dance-pop style arrangements featuring *kemençe* (Akat 2010:149). The song is an over-the-top performance of the stereotypically macho Black Sea man. The main melody of the song and some aspects of the musical arrangement are derived from the early 2000s international *bhangra* hit “Mundian To Bach Ke” by Panjabi MC. But the lyrics of the song are explicitly about masculinity and male control in romantic relationships, with a particularly macho Black Sea spin. The singer addresses a male friend whose wife, he says, doesn’t take his friend seriously. He complains to his friend, “You’re not making your woman do as she is told” (“Bi sözü geçiremedun karuna”) and rec-

ommends to him, “Why don’t you give her a good smack across the face and put her in her place?” (“Daha niye vermedun ağzının payını?”). The whole text is permeated with Black Sea pronunciation; the tag line of the song’s chorus, “Ne oldi sana? Ne oldi böyle?” (“What’s up with you? What’s up with that?”), became a running joke in Turkey during 2003, often quoted complete with Black Sea dialect pronunciation (the word “oldi” would be “oldu” in standard Turkish, and comes across as particularly comical to speakers in urban western Turkey).

The clip for the song (fig. 6) features Güloğlu playing his hypermasculine “Laz” character, dancing *horon* on the beach or (via a composite shot) while appearing to stand on the surface of the water; in some shots, he reclines in the shallows while aggressively slapping and punching at the water (actions that resonate with the line of the song text about giving the woman a smack) while wearing a tank top that shows off his glistening wet arm muscles. Other shots include women dancing (also often in the water) with sultry looks on their faces, and a group of *horon* dancers on a beach, framed tightly on the dancers’ feet as they kick up the sand. The frenetic editing pace of the clip—constant quick cuts, with no shot lasting more than a few seconds—also captures visually the stereotypical restless energy popularly associated with the people of the Black Sea coast.

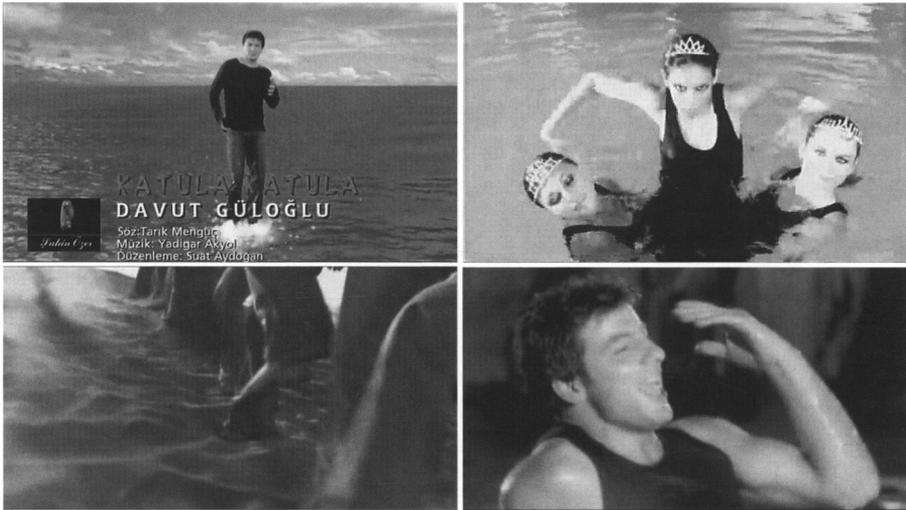


Fig. 6: Still images from Davut Güloğlu’s clip “Katula Katula” (2003).

Perhaps unsurprisingly, not all people from the Black Sea coastal region find “Laz pop” entertaining. In 2001 the Istanbul-based journalist İrfan Demir, who has family roots in the Black Sea region, filed at the office of the public prosecutor in Istanbul a criminal complaint against “Laz pop” artists Davut Güloğlu, Tarık Tüfekçi

and Kont Adnan on the grounds that they “insulted Black Sea culture and music” (Anonymous 2001a, 2001b). The complaint alleged that the artists in question “degenerated and damaged” (*yozlaştırıp bozdukları*) Black Sea music with their songs and videoclips. Addressing the representations of women in “Laz pop” videoclips, the complaint further charged that clips by these artists “turn our girls into sexual objects.” Another news story from 2004 addresses the pop-isation (*poplaşma*) of Black Sea music by combining it with “techno” dance beats, juxtaposing short quotes from interviews with “Laz pop” artists defending their work with quotes from musicians working within what I below call the neo-traditional approach to Black Sea music who criticise it (Döndaş 2004).

“Laz pop” signifies on and instantiates existing stereotypes regarding the people of the Turkish Black Sea coast. Taking its place alongside ethnic jokes about “Laz Temel” and other humour based on the comical accent that Black Sea coastal dwellers are said to have, these musical popular cultural expressions essentially turn “Laz” music, culture and identity into an ongoing joke. The “Laz” become buffoons whose primary reason for existence in Turkey is simply to entertain other Turks. In a way similar to that in which blackface minstrelsy and derived forms such as early sound cartoons in the USA deployed “Negro” characters for the entertainment of the majority white population (Solomon 2014), “Laz pop” constructs one segment of society as an internal other and turns it into an object of ridicule for the purpose of entertainment.

Music and the Laz Cultural Movement

In contrast to the representations of “Laz pop” and other Turkish popular cultural stereotypical representations of people from the Black Sea coast, since the 1980s a new Laz cultural movement has aimed at recovering and revitalising traditional Laz culture and language and using them to reconstruct an authentic Laz identity. Historian Hale Yılmaz (2006) has written about this movement, and the next paragraph draws extensively on her work.¹³

The Laz cultural movement has been spearheaded primarily not by individuals residing in the historical Laz homeland in the provinces of Rize and Artvin, but by intellectuals, activists and artists—especially university students—with roots in the region but based in Istanbul and in the diaspora in Germany, especially in the cities of Cologne and Dortmund (Yılmaz 2006:256). The movement takes as a point of departure the premises that authentic Laz culture and identity are “endangered” and that “the Turkish state is to blame, because it has followed a policy of denial and assimilation since the beginning of the Republic in 1923” (Yılmaz 2006:257). The work of these activists has focused especially “on Laz language, history, customs and traditions,” with the Laz language Lazuri being “the main pillar of the Laz culture and identity” (Yılmaz 2006:259). In cooperation with sympathetic foreign academic linguists such as Wolfgang Feurstein from Germany and Gōichi Kojima from

Japan, linguistic work has focused on creating a Laz alphabet and standard form of the language (out of the various existing dialects) for writing what was historically not a written language. This work has included creating basic reference tools such as dictionaries and grammars, developing pedagogical materials that can be used to teach Lazuri, and offering Lazuri language classes such as the ones given in the Lazebura cultural centre in Cologne (Yılmaz 2006:259–60). In addition to this practical linguistic work, activists have also created print publications such as the magazines *Ogni*, *Mjora*, and *Tanura* and various sites on the Internet¹⁴ which serve as vehicles for articles about Laz history and culture and as forums for internal debate within the movement regarding priorities and strategies (Yılmaz 2006:257). Overall, the activities of these activists are oriented toward trying to “awaken” (Kavaklı 2015) what they think of as a dormant Laz ethnic consciousness among the descendants of the historic Laz population of northeast Turkey (Bellér-Hann 1995a:498). While the movement has made clear that its agenda is obtaining cultural and linguistic rights for the Laz, and it does not espouse separatism, the Turkish state has not looked kindly on the movement’s activities and has tried to stop, for example, publication and distribution of the Laz cultural journal *Ogni* mentioned above (Yılmaz 2006:267–8).

Music has played a significant role in the Laz cultural movement, broadly defined. But rather than follow one consistent strategy for using music to promote Laz culture and identity, musicians associated with this movement either closely or loosely have developed a number of approaches to performing Lazness. Here I discuss three approaches which I call 1) cosmopolitan youth, 2) back to roots and 3) neo-traditional, taking them roughly in chronological order according to their emergence during the 1990s. This typology is provisional; while I distinguish the three approaches in terms of their aesthetics and aspects of artistic practice, in practice they overlap, and musicians may navigate between them over time as they progress from one album or project to another.

Cosmopolitan Youth Approach

The cosmopolitan youth approach is based on engagement with globally circulating popular music genres (primarily rock), hybridising them with traditional Laz music and culture, and employing them in the service of constructing a contemporary Laz youth identity that is both rooted in Laz culture and language and oriented to the world at large. The pioneers of this approach were the band *Zuğaşi Berepe* (“Children of the Sea” in Lazuri, evoking the Black Sea as the progenitor of Laz identity). The group was formed in Istanbul in 1993 by university students, two of them ethnic Laz from northeastern Turkey, including a fluent speaker of Lazuri. The band released two albums, *Va Mişkunan* (“We Don’t Know,” 1995) and *İgzas* (“Walking,” 1998) before breaking up in the late 1990s.

The front cover of the group's first album (fig. 7) visually establishes their project of using rock music as an idiom for promoting Laz language and culture. Placed between the name of the group and the album title, both written in Lazuri in all caps, is a photograph of an older Laz village woman who is looking straight at the viewer and pointing her finger as if to get the viewer's attention. In a series of private messages we exchanged via Facebook in September 2017, Zuğışı Berepe founding member Mehmedali Barış Beşli explained to me the story behind and intent of the album cover design with this photo. The woman in the photo is Zera Nandidi, the grandmother of another founding member of the group, Kazım Koyuncu. The photo was extracted as a still image from film shot during a trip by the group to Koyuncu's family home in Hopa. The image was specifically chosen both for the personal family connection to a much-loved grandmother and for the communicative potential of the feisty gesture she is making toward the camera. When I asked Beşli if the photo is intended to communicate a specific idea or message, he answered "Without a doubt" and noted the similarity of this photo of a Laz grandmother to an iconic U.S.-American image in which a figure also aggressively points his finger at the viewer:

Zera Nandidi's gesture is a response to Uncle Sam's 'I want you!' This gesture was for us an act calling attention to how the potential listener—especially Laz youth—should remember their responsibilities. Like the grandmother in the photo, the Laz language was stubborn, old and naïve, and in this way she was pointing at you. This work—to pass on the Laz language to the next generation like Zera Nandidi's generation passed it on to us, to take the next step and consciously claim ownership of it, to make sure it lives and breathes—this is the work that was called for at that time. That's the message we wanted to send: I want you for the Laz language. (Personal communication, 20 September 2017)¹⁵

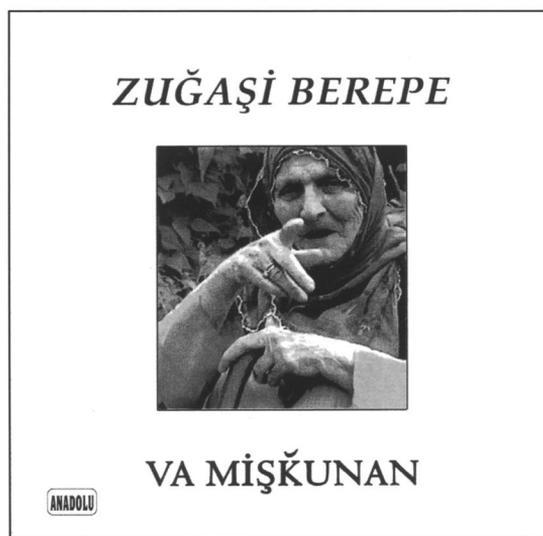


Fig. 7: Front cover of the CD *Va Mişkunan* by *Zuğışı Berepe*.

The five core members of the group on the first album sang and played acoustic and electric guitars, bass and drums; the group's basic sound was thus that of a rock band. They were supplemented by different keyboard players on most of the tracks and *tulum* (played by veteran Hemşin musician Mahmut Turan) on one song. The first two tracks of the eight on the album are rock versions of folk melodies using asymmetrical metres typical of Laz music, 5/8 and 7/8. The first of these features the *tulum*, which shares the primary melody with the lead electric guitar (see Bates 2016:99 for insightful comments on how these instruments are mixed in the recording). Five of the songs on the album are original rock compositions in Lazuri; only one song on the album is sung in Turkish. Besides the political statement created by the simple fact of writing and singing in Lazuri, the more generally leftist political sentiments of the group (especially of activist, singer, and lyrics writer Mehmedali Barış Beşli) also find expression in songs such as "Ernesto," a Lazuri-language homage to Che Guevara.

While the rock stylings of Zuğışı Berepe's first album aligned most closely with the so-called grunge rock associated with the U.S.-American city of Seattle during the early 1990s, and the band Nirvana in particular (Bates 2016:98), on the band's second album *İgzas* they expanded their sound palette significantly (see Bates 2016:100 for a brief discussion of some of the different rock influences), as well as incorporating on some tracks driving rhythms and textures evocative of electronic dance music or fast-tempo breakbeat music, for example on "Dadışkimi." The band's broader Laz identity project, and the relationship of that project to political issues that affect the eastern Black Sea region, is also highlighted in the 16-page booklet accompanying the CD. One entire page is in English, beginning with a text titled "Who are the Laz?" and including short explanations of Laz ethnicity and language, and a brief account of the band's history and philosophy. Another full page is given over to a statement (in Turkish, though the headline is also given in Lazuri) opposing the construction of a dam and hydroelectric power station in Fırtına Valley in the province of Rize, a development which would be devastating for the natural environment and human communities in the valley.

Zuğışı Berepe broke up in the late 1990s. One of the founding members, singer and composer Kazım Koyuncu, then embarked on a successful solo career until his death from cancer in June 2005. While his solo albums mostly embraced what I discuss below as the "neo-traditional" approach, in his live performances he continued to cultivate a version of the "Laz rock" or "Black Sea rock" (the terms are mostly used interchangeably, even if their implications are somewhat different) that Zuğışı Berepe pioneered, including *kemençe* and *tulum* as lead instruments in his band along with electric guitar, bass and drums.¹⁶ Since the turn of the millennium, new groups such as Marsis and Karmate have continued to develop the idea of "Black Sea rock" (*Karadeniz rock* in Turkish) though they also have a foot firmly planted in the neo-traditional approach discussed below.¹⁷

Given the explicitly political and oppositional stance associated with rap music, one might expect that Lazuri-language rap and hip-hop culture would also emerge

as a genre apt for the cosmopolitan youth approach to performing Laz and eastern Black Sea identity. A few amateur rappers have uploaded to YouTube videos of themselves rapping in Lazuri,¹⁸ but the concept does not seem to have caught on, and as of yet there are no performers of note using rap and hip-hop to promote the new Laz cultural agenda. It may be that Kont Adnan's use of rap and hip-hop style within the context of "Laz pop" has effectively tainted rap music as a genre, making it less appealing to musicians searching for an idiom with which to make serious, politically engaged art, though that is speculation on my part.

Back to Roots Approach

The "back to roots" approach emphasises a combination of research and performance. Its practitioners use ethnomusicological methods to collect and document regional traditional musics through careful field work *in situ*; they also study existing archival materials. They then use the results of this research as the basis for new creative projects. While other performers of Black Sea traditional music may also do some sporadic collecting in the field as a way of gathering new repertoire, the difference here is that the research process itself is explicitly and transparently made part of the creative process, as selections from the original source materials gathered may also be made available to the listening public by publishing the field recordings themselves with extensive accompanying documentation.

The foremost representative of the back to roots approach is Birol Topaloğlu (born 1965 in the village of Apso, administratively attached to the town of Pazar in Rize province).¹⁹ Topaloğlu is a native speaker of Laz; he learned Turkish as a second language after age 6 when he started school. He was professionally trained not as a musicologist or folklorist but as an electrical engineer, an occupation which he held for several years. While he started his amateur musical career playing the Turkish *bağlama* (a long-necked plucked lute with frets) and singing Anatolian Turkish folk music, he was dissatisfied with this form of musical expression, and began researching the traditional music of Lazuri-speaking communities (including his home village), documenting local musical practice in field recordings, as well as assembling historical recordings and documentation from various private collections. At the encouragement of legendary Turkish jazz and folk musician Erkan Oğur, he began developing an idiom for arranging the songs he collected for new studio recordings and live performances by his own small ensemble, eventually turning professional as a full-time musician.

Topaloğlu, who sings and plays *kemençe*, *tulum* and percussion, has released several albums featuring arrangements (by himself and various collaborators) of songs he recorded in Laz villages. For example, of the twelve tracks on his first album *Heyamo—Lazuri Birape*, released in 1997, eight are listed in the credits as being collected in the field (*derleme*) by Topaloğlu himself.²⁰ While most of the album thus consists of arrangements of material collected during original field work, the

melody on the first track “Arsima” is Topaloğlu’s own composition, his setting of a poem by Laz activist and poet Selma Koçiva, based in Dortmund. The opening of the album thus immediately connects Topaloğlu’s musical project to the transnational community of Laz cultural activists. The album as a whole features mostly local instruments from the Laz-speaking area (*kemençe* and *tulum*) plus acoustic guitar and a variety of percussion instruments (played in layered arrangements that often recall the style of the multicultural musical group Kardeş Türküler, some of whose members play on the album). Several tracks grouped together in the second half of the album, however, eschew percussion entirely and consist of only vocals accompanied by *kemençe* or *tulum*, reproducing village practice. A few of the album’s tracks recreate village soundscapes through the incorporation of speaking voices and sound effects recorded in the studio or in the field, such as the sounds of running water and bells hanging around the necks of animals that begin track 9. Another track is simply an unedited field recording of Topaloğlu’s own mother performing a lament for a lost child (Topaloğlu’s older brother, who disappeared from his home village without a trace at the age of 16) (Özdemir 1997:25–6). While there is, in fact, much studio arrangement work behind the album, the overall effect is that the album sounds more like it is based on folkloric documentation rather than being a highly arranged studio project. The album is generally considered to be the first full-length recording entirely in Lazuri (though one track is in the closely related Mingrelian language spoken in Georgia) to be commercially released in Turkey.

In addition to his albums featuring studio arrangements of Laz music, Topaloğlu also published in 2001 the double CD *Lazeburi*, a compilation of his field recordings and other archival recordings gathered from various private collections, and which includes an 80-page hardbound book with explanatory text on the recordings, in Turkish and English. The CD and accompanying book constitute a multimedia resource on contemporary and recent historical Laz folklore and musical culture, useful in its own right as primary documentation while also providing a context for the creative work found on Topaloğlu’s other albums. The package allows listeners to trace Topaloğlu’s creative path from the source recordings (*derleme*) on this collection to the arranged versions on his studio albums. For example, the *Lazeburi* album includes an (undated) archival recording of the song “Luşi Birapa” (“Black Cabbage Song,” CD 1, track 10), which is apparently the main source for an arranged version of the same song which had appeared on Topaloğlu’s 2000 album *Aravani* (track 14). While the source recording features a single musician (Ahmet Güngör) who sings and accompanies himself on the *kemençe*, the arranged version includes *kemençe* and percussion (a large cylindrical box the player sits astride while playing, similar to the Peruvian *cajón*), and a more complex vocal arrangement including call and response between solo voice and group. Not all the verses from the original recording are used, and those that are, are arranged in a different order; a new contrasting section with different text and a new melody is also introduced, serving as a kind of chorus between the verses using the original melody.^{21, 22}

The relationship between the source recordings and arranged versions is also evoked in the cover art for the two CDs (fig. 8). The cover of the *Lazeburi* collection features a photograph taken in an old house (presumably in a Laz village, though no information about the photo's provenance is given). From the straw visible on the floor, it appears to be a room used to keep animals inside for protection, for example from theft or during cold nights. In the centre of the photograph stands a chair on which a *kemençe* fiddle with bow and a *tulum* bagpipe are placed. The photo thus evokes a rural context and the traditional musical expressions one finds there. The cover of the studio album *Aravani* features a photo taken in the same room, though this time the instruments are absent, the chair is lying on its side, and Birol Topaloğlu is standing there looking pensively down at the floor, as if contemplating the age and significance of the space. This visual link between the two albums, one featuring source material and the other featuring arrangements based on that material, serves to establish how they are both parts of a single project to recuperate traditional Laz music and culture and carry them into the future in a way that is always mindful and respectful of the past.

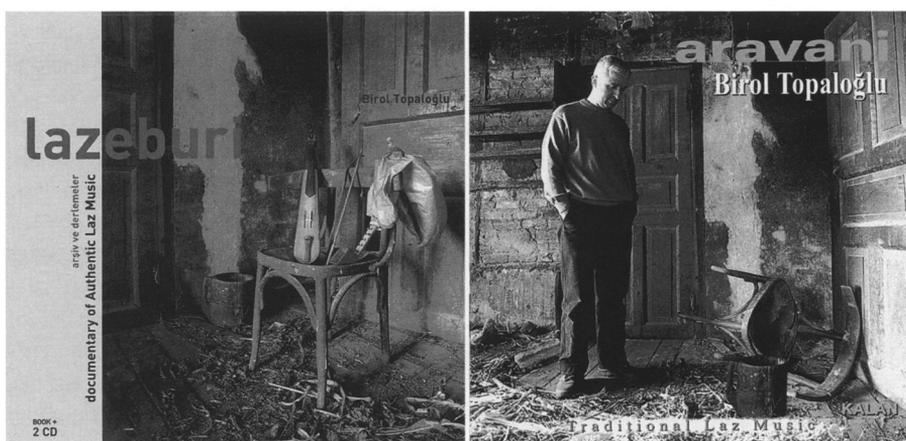


Fig. 8: Front covers of the CDs *Lazeburi* (2001) and *Aravani* (2000).

In a way similar to the state attempts to censor the activities of Laz cultural activists mentioned above, Topaloğlu has also experienced harassment by the Turkish state because of his musical activities. Yılmaz reports that after he appeared on a radio program in Ardeşen in Rize province in 1999, Topaloğlu was indicted by the public prosecutor “on grounds of inciting the public to hatred and enmity on the basis of race” (2006:268). The indictment was later dismissed, after “Topaloğlu defended himself arguing he did not have any separatist goals and that his aim was only to help preserve Laz culture, especially its language and music” (Yılmaz 2006:268).

Another representative of the back to roots approach is the singer-researcher Ayşenur Kolivar. Kolivar has studied musicology and music theory at PhD level in Istanbul,²³ while also directing the group Helesa which works to collect, document and perform eastern Black Sea music. Like Topaloğlu, she has used her own field recordings as the basis for her artistic work with various performing groups (Bates 2016:104). Her double CD *Bahçeye Hanımeli* (“Honeysuckle for the Garden”) released in 2012 is the result of many years of research in northeastern Turkey and reflection over the politics of representation within creative practice inside and outside the recording studio (see Bates 2016:264–71 for an extensive discussion of this album).

Neo-Traditional Approach

While the cosmopolitan youth approach discussed above is grounded in adopting an entire genre (rock music) from outside Turkey and then incorporating local elements (language, rhythms, specific songs) into it, the neo-traditional approach takes the opposite tack, using traditional genres, songs and instruments as the starting point, but then expanding the musical palette through the introduction of novel and eclectic arrangement practices. The music made with this approach is thus closely related to the post-2000 recordings of arranged traditional music that Eliot Bates (2010 & 2016) has studied, and the musicians themselves may be only loosely connected to the Laz cultural movement. As I understand the neo-traditional approach, however, original compositions that to varying degrees draw on traditional musical forms and sounds—as opposed to authentic songs sourced from *derlemes*—play a somewhat bigger role than Bates allows for, though the typical neo-traditional album includes a mix of original compositions and items sourced from archives.

Studio arrangements within the neo-traditional approach typically make use of an eclectic mix of musical instruments, ranging from folk and art music instruments from other regions of Turkey and surrounding countries—such as *ney* and *kaval* (end-blown flutes), *asma davul* (large bass drum), bouzouki, *garmon* (Azeri and Georgian button accordion), *yaylı tambur* (large bowed lute), *cümbüş* (fretless lute with metal resonating bowl)—to other instruments associated with European art and popular musics such as transverse concert flute, piano, violin, clarinet, saxophone and e-bow, to name only a few. The Black Sea folk instruments *kemençe* and *tulum* may also be present, but they do not necessarily dominate the sound, and may be completely absent from many tracks. Rock drumming and electric guitar textures are occasionally heard in the neo-traditional approach, but they are not an indicator of a consistent allegiance to the rock genre, as they are in the cosmopolitan youth approach. They are rather just two more elements that artists and arrangers can draw on.

The different songs on a neo-traditional album are typically arranged to contrast with each other, varying the instrumental palette from track to track. The music

is marked, however, by the relative absence of the *bağlama*—the instrument that dominates the performance of most contemporary Turkish folk music from Anatolia—with the result that arranged neo-traditional Black Sea music, which otherwise shares much of the same set of studio practices for arrangement and recording as other recorded folk music in Turkey post 2000, maintains a sonic difference from ethnically “Turkish” folk music from other regions of Anatolia. The acoustic guitar (with metal or nylon strings) is an important element in this approach, both in the sound of the music and in the visual representations of the artists. The frequent picturing on album covers of artists with an acoustic guitar reimagines the Laz or Black Sea musician in the image of the singer/songwriter and contemporary minstrel (fig. 9). This strategic repositioning of the Black Sea artist—the “Laz” musician not as a comical, *kemençe*-wielding buffoon but as a thoughtful poet-troubadour in the mode of Bob Dylan—can be understood as a strategy for establishing what musicologist Allan Moore calls “first person authenticity,” which “arises when an originator (composer, performer) succeeds in conveying the impression that his/her utterance is one of integrity, that it represents an attempt to communicate in an unmediated form with an audience” (2002:214). In the case of neo-traditional Laz and Black Sea music, such integrity has as much to do with respectful treatment of the musical material (in explicit contrast to “Laz pop”) as it does with the performer’s personal integrity as a serious artist.

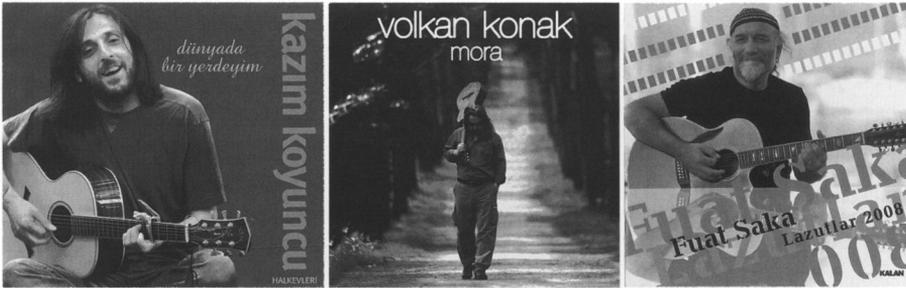


Fig. 9: Iconography of the neo-traditional approach: the image of the singer/songwriter/player of the acoustic guitar on album covers by Kazım Koyuncu, Volkan Konak and Fuat Saka.

The music of Black Sea artists taking the neo-traditional approach often also articulates generally progressive sentiments regarding issues such as cultural rights and the environment, and musicians working in this vein may actively associate themselves with leftist causes and work in projects together with other leftist musicians. There are many musicians working within this approach; two prominent and representative ones are Kazım Koyuncu and Fuat Saka.

Kazım Koyuncu was born in 1971 in the town of Hopa in Artvin province, close to the border with Georgia. As noted above, he was a founding member of Zuğışı Berepe and remained with the group until it disbanded in the late 1990s, at which point he continued professionally in a highly successful solo career. While Koyuncu's live performances continued largely in the vein of "Laz rock" established by Zuğışı Berepe, his studio albums (with the exception of a few tracks) mostly departed from the rock sound of Zuğışı Berepe, embracing the (mostly acoustic) *Karadeniz* (Black Sea) genre of arranged traditional music described by Bates (2016, chapter 9).

Koyuncu's second solo album *Hayde* ("Come along!" or "Let's go!") released in 2004—the year before he died—was by far his most successful. It includes music he composed and/or arranged for the popular Turkish soap opera "Gülbeyaz" (2002–2003), which was set on the Black Sea coast (though it was filmed in Bartın on the western Black Sea coast, far from the eastern coast referenced in the music Koyuncu created for the show). The album includes songs sung in Lazuri, Mingrelian, Georgian, Hemşin and Turkish. The song "Tsira," track 5 on the album, is a love song in Mingrelian with a spare, delicate arrangement featuring acoustic guitar, multiple violins in a polyphonic arrangement and *garmon* (button accordion) accompanying Koyuncu's emotive solo vocal. The use of the Mingrelian language and the delicate, ballad-like arrangement follow in the vein of Kazım's earlier recording of the song "Didou Nana" (on his solo debut album *Viya!* from 2001), a Black Sea "hit" first recorded in Turkey by Birol Topaloğlu and subsequently covered by a number of singers. Koyuncu's recordings of these songs continue the project of tracing cultural, linguistic, and musical links between the Laz of Turkey and the Mingrelians of Georgia, while the neo-traditional arrangement aestheticises these links in a way that can appeal to a broader audience (most of whom would not understand the song text in Mingrelian) while avoiding Black Sea musical clichés.

Koyuncu died of lung cancer in 2005; many attribute his illness to the fallout of radiation from the Chernobyl nuclear plant disaster in Ukraine on the other side of the Black Sea, which occurred in 1986, when Koyuncu was fourteen years old (Bates 2016:101–2). In the wake of his death a body of hagiographic literature about Koyuncu (e.g. Biryol 2015; Öztürk 2014) and documentary films (Kervancı 2005; Kıvanç 2008) have established him as a kind of culture hero within the Laz cultural movement and the broader multicultural movement within Turkey, to the extent that Kolivar (2012:361–2) speaks of the "cult" of Kazım, referring to how he has inspired a new generation of musicians to play contemporary arrangements of traditional Black Sea music (see also Bates 2016:101–3; Öztürk & Erol 2008).

The second neo-traditional artist I will discuss is singer-guitarist Fuat Saka. Saka was born in Trabzon in 1952; he has connections to the former Soviet Republic of Georgia or to Georgian ethnicity on both his father's and his mother's side. For political reasons he left Turkey for Germany after the 1980 coup; he lived in exile there for nearly 20 years before being able to return to Turkey in 1999, and now divides his time between Turkey, Germany and France (Bates 2008:78; Greve 2003:65, 68). Saka's music has been referred to as "Laz jazz" due to its eclectic mix of Black Sea

instruments and styles with other, mostly acoustic instruments; Saka's own percussive way of playing acoustic guitar typically drives the arrangements, rhythmically propelling songs forward. In his recordings Saka frequently plays several instruments (primarily different plucked stringed instruments and percussion) on the same song via multitracking in the recording studio. Being from Trabzon (historic capital of the former Empire of Trebizond), Saka has a particular interest in the music of the region surrounding that city, including that of the Pontic Greeks, most of whom left Turkey during the forced population exchange with Greece in 1923. He has recorded songs in Pontic Greek and collaborates frequently with Greek musicians.

Saka is best known, however, for his series of albums titled *Lazutlar* (of which to date there are seven, including an album of remixes). *Lazut* means "corn" in Lazuri; the word has also spread to adjacent non-Lazuri-speaking areas, but is otherwise not commonly understood outside northeast Turkey (Aleksişi 2014). The name *Lazutlar* (in the plural, using the Turkish plural suffix *-lar*) of the album series thus means "grains of corn"; the name uses a staple crop of the lower valleys of the Black Sea coast to evoke how the individual songs on the album are small "grains" that come together to form a larger Black Sea musical "serving" in the form of the album as a whole. "Lazutlar" is also the name of the first track on the first album of the series, effectively introducing the concept (though before anyone could know that the first album's success would lead to a series of sequels). But because most people in Turkey don't know the original meaning of the word *lazut*, and given the similarity of the word to "Laz" as an ethnic designator, and because Saka's music is based on traditional music of the eastern Black Sea region, many people assume that the name of the album series refers to the Laz. (When I asked one native Turkish speaker what does "lazutlar" mean, she answered that she wasn't sure, but imagined that it means "Laz uşakları" [the Laz people].)

It is significant here that Saka himself, from Trabzon to the west of the historically Laz region, has no direct ties to the Laz language or ethnicity. While he sings some songs in Lazuri, it is with a heavy Turkish accent. Laz researcher/performer and native Lazuri speaker Birol Topaloğlu (discussed above), while having some misgivings about Saka's (mis)pronunciation of Lazuri, suggests that Saka's contribution is a positive one within the overall project of countering stereotypical representations of Black Sea culture (Özdemir 1997:27). Saka's serious and respectful treatment of the source material serves as a counterweight to the representations of "Laz pop" predicated on Lazness as a source of humour. That Saka's "Laz jazz" can be included within the purview of Laz musical expression is indicative of how the definition of authentic Lazness can be malleable. In this case, it may even be seen to approach the broader Turkish popular cultural understanding of the Laz as anyone from the anywhere along the Black Sea coast. But Saka's multicultural approach to Black Sea music, including his attempts to sing (even if with mixed results) in Lazuri, Pontic Greek and Georgian, along with his other musical choices, align his project with more progressive approaches to Laz identity, and he thus distances himself and his project from unflattering musical stereotypes of Black Sea coastal dwellers.

The choice of repertoire, variety of languages sung in and eclectic arrangement practices of neo-traditional Laz and Black Sea music point to the place of Lazness as only one component of a more general eastern Black Sea identity based on shared regional culture that also embraces other historical and contemporary ethnolinguistic groups including speakers of Mingrelian, Hemşin (related to Armenian), Pontic Greek, Georgian and Turkish. The neo-traditional approach thus also recognises the eastern Black Sea coast as a multicultural region in which different ethnic groups interact and share some cultural traits. The back to roots approach also increasingly embraces this multicultural approach, as can be heard on Ayşenur Kolivar's album *Bahçeye Hanımelî* mentioned above. In this regard, these musical expressions have gone beyond the specific focus on Laz language and cultural identity associated with the Laz cultural movement. This development should also be situated within the larger movement in Turkey since the 1990s toward musical multiculturalism (Akkaya et al. 2008; Aksoy 2011; Hough 2010; Özer 2008, 2011; Reigle 2013), in which other ethnic and cultural identities such as Kurdish, Zaza, Alevi and Armenian are being reconstituted and asserted through music (and in which recordings released by the record label Kalan frequently play a significant role; see Değirmenci 2013:34–46; Bates 2016:104–8), though a full discussion of that aspect is beyond the scope of this article.

There is some overlap between the three approaches I describe here, and artists may move between them for different projects. For example, while Birol Topaloğlu's early albums were mostly based on fairly sparse arrangements featuring the local instruments *kemençe* and *tulum*—setting the standard for the “back to roots” approach—for his third studio album *Ezmoce* released in 2007 he embraced the neo-traditional approach. That album featured much more elaborate arrangements, incorporating instruments as diverse as clarinet, didgeridoo and Indian tabla, effectively recasting Laz music as world music. But for his next album *Destani* (2008), he returned to a resolutely ethnographic-documentary approach, as the entire album is made up of songs in a single genre (the *destani* narrative ballad that gives the album its name), with each track featuring only voice and melodic accompaniment by one instrument (*kemençe* on eight of the ten tracks, and *tulum* or *kaval* [end-blown flute] on each of the other two). There is no mixing of different instruments on individual tracks, and no percussion at all on the entire album. And one of the albums in Fuat Saka's “Lazutlar” series, *Lazutlar—Seçemeler*, is a remix album that includes “techno” remixes of some of his earlier tracks, approaching in some ways the style of “Laz pop.”

Conclusion: Sounding Laz Identity in a Musical Public Sphere

I return now to Stokes' notion of musical conversation and the idea of a musical public sphere, as evoked at the beginning of this article. Extending the metaphor of conversation from specific recordings to the level of genres and musical practices

more generally, I suggest that the different ways of musically performing Lazness and Black Sea coastal identity I have discussed are effectively in dialogue with each other. Existing stereotypes within Turkish popular culture about the people who live along the Black Sea coast, along with the interventions of the activist-intellectuals of the Laz cultural movement, provide discursive contexts for debates about “Laz” and Black Sea identity. But much of the “conversation” about who the Laz are occurs not within the discursive content of rational talk, but through musical performances mediated through CDs and concerts. These musical mediations also have visual components in the images on album covers and in videoclips. Multimedia expressions such as these offer embodied experiences of identity that can be felt in visceral ways that go far beyond rationally directed discourse.

The idea of cultural expressions being in dialogue and collectively debating the nature of the identity of a subaltern social group resonates with the way since the 1990s that Habermas’ concept of the public sphere has been remade in terms of dominant public and counterpublics (Fraser 1990; Warner 2002). Phrased in these terms, the widespread popular cultural understanding of the “Laz” in Turkey functions as a discourse associated with a dominant public, which the musical genre “Laz pop” instantiates through its performances of a Lazness that embraces stereotypes of the Black Sea coastal dweller as a comical buffoon. In opposition to those representations, the Laz cultural movement, and the various musical interventions associated with it that seek to recuperate Laz cultural identity and cast it in a positive light, function as what Nancy Fraser calls a *subaltern counterpublic* (or, if one prefers to distinguish between the different approaches I describe, a set of subaltern counterpublics). Fraser defines subaltern counterpublics as “parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses, which in turn permit them to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs;” subaltern counterpublics thus “emerge in response to exclusions within dominant publics; they help expand discursive space” (1990:67). But, as I have described above, the debate about Laz cultural identity is carried out not just at the discursive level, in the sense of the propositional content of statements made in rationally directed language. Both the dominant representation (instantiated in “Laz pop”) and counterdiscourses of Laz identity are mediated through performative gestures of musical sound and image that construct Lazness in terms of feelingful experiences. Even language, which functions primarily as a vehicle for rational statements within the Habermasian public sphere, becomes feelingful and performative—beyond the level of the strictly discursive—whether in the deployment of the Black Sea dialect of Turkish for comical effect, or in the sounding of languages other than Turkish, such as Laz and Mingrelian. For listeners who do not understand song texts in these languages, the sound itself of the language—or more specifically, of the sounding voices of the singers who sing in them—signifies through pure sound, asserting that these languages do indeed exist.

This article has primarily employed textual approaches to the analysis of Laz cultural identity, using commercial sound recordings and associated media texts as

data for a first assessment of the performance of Lazness. The next step in this work would be an ethnographic study of actual performances and instances of reception, addressing how specific listeners actually use these musics and their mediations of identity in their everyday lives. Such an ethnography would also benefit from attention to the media work of Black Sea-themed radio and TV stations, analogous to the research Tucker (2013) has done on radio in Peru. The performances of Lazness and Black Sea cultural identity described above do not exhaust the range of ways in which Black Sea identity is performed musically in Turkey. But hopefully this discussion will lead to further work on how Laz identity is sounded in Turkey.

Notes

- 1 The research reported on in this article was presented at various conferences and symposia, including: the 5th meeting of the ICTM Study Group “Music and Minorities,” 24 May–1 June 2008, Prague; the BFE Study Day: Sounding Ethnicity, 30 April 2016, Nottingham; and the 33rd meeting of the European Seminar in Ethnomusicology, Tbilisi, 5–9 September 2017. Thanks to all those colleagues who commented on my presentations at those fora, as well as to two anonymous readers for the journal who provided comments on the manuscript. Thanks also to Laz musician and activist Mehmedali Barış Beşli for taking time to answer some questions. And thanks to Çağla Kulakaç, whose family comes from Giresun on the Black Sea coast, for help with interpreting some of the Turkish-language texts and for sharing her perceptions of Black Sea music. *Sen yağmur ol, ben bulut—Maçka'da buluşalım.*
- 2 I should note, however, that Hann expresses skepticism regarding the use of the term “ethnolinguistic group” in regard to the Laz, given that “virtually no one is literate in the language and most of those who speak it are both fluent and literate in modern Turkish” (1997:122).
- 3 Not all Laz living in western Turkey are labour migrants; some are descendants of refugees who fled the regions of Hopa and Batumi during the Russo-Turkish war in the late nineteenth century (Bellér-Hann 1995a:489–90; Kutscher 2008:83, n.2).
- 4 See Yılmaz (2006:254, n. 4) on the methodological problems of calculating the number of speakers of Lazuri.
- 5 Meeker uses the term *Lazi* to refer to the specific ethnolinguistic group, in order to distinguish it from the broader meaning of *Laz* as potentially anyone from the Black Sea coast.
- 6 It plays right into this racial stereotype that the current holder of the Guinness World Record for longest nose on a living person is Mehmet Yürek, a man from Artvin just inland from the coast in northeast Turkey.
- 7 The first time I traveled by air from Istanbul to the eastern Black Sea coast in 2004, upon landing at the airport in Trabzon the pilot came onto the plane’s speaker system and announced “Ladies and gentlemen, Tirebizona hoşgeldunuz” (“Welcome to Trabzon”); the thick Black Sea dialect of the final word (which would have been *hoşgeldiniz* in standard Turkish) caused the passengers to erupt in laughter. For a critique of popular Turkish (mis)conceptions regarding Black Sea dialect, see Kolivar (2006).
- 8 For an organological discussion of the *kemençe* (Black Sea fiddle), focusing on the history of the instrument, materials and construction, tuning, playing technique, musical types and repertoire (including transcriptions), see Picken (1975:296–337). For other ethnomusicological and

- folkloristic studies of Black Sea music, see Ahrens (1970), Kojima (2003), Picken (1954), K. Reinhard (1966), U. Reinhard (2000) and K. & U. Reinhard (1968). Şenel (1994) provides a useful compilation of resources for further archival study of folk music in the region around Trabzon.
- 9 See Picken (1975:528–49) for an organological discussion of the *tulum*.
 - 10 For a short example of music played on *kemençe* and associated with the “Laz” character in the Turkish Karagöz shadow puppet theater, see CD 2, track 13 “Yavuz Geliyor Yavuz” in *78 Devirli Taş Plak Kayıtlarıyla Türk Gölge Oyunu Karagöz*.
 - 11 I put the term “Laz pop” in scare quotes in order to indicate that the genre has nothing to do with the Laz ethnolinguistic group.
 - 12 Bates (2013) expresses scepticism regarding the “violence” done to certain Turkish rhythms by reducing them to time signatures like 5/8 (subdivided 2 + 3), when actually the rhythm “is felt as a two, with one shorter beat followed by a longer beat,” without any “inherent ‘five-ness.’”
 - 13 See also Aksoylu (2009, chapter 7) and Koçiva (2014) for discussions of the Laz cultural movement.
 - 14 E. g. <http://lazika.net> and <http://www.lazuri.com>. Last accessed 15 December 2017.
 - 15 Translated by me from the original Turkish.
 - 16 For video of a complete concert by Kazım Koyuncu illustrating his approach to “Laz rock” ca. 2004, see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MugCfxq2Ccc>. Last accessed 30 June 2017.
 - 17 Kolivar (2011:79) notes that there were at least 20 bands doing “Karadeniz Rock” around the time she was writing.
 - 18 See, for example, the Lazuri-language rapping by Mod Kankum in the clip “Lazuri in the Mix,” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_SEAC1H88rQ. Last accessed 29 June 2017.
 - 19 Biographical information in this paragraph is taken from several published interviews with Topaloğlu, including Akkaya (2008), Özdemir (1997) and Topaloğlu & Yıldırım (2001).
 - 20 On the significance of *derleme* (original source, typically a recording or transcription with accompanying documentation) as guarantee of authenticity in contemporary traditional music in Turkey, see Bates (2016:50–4).
 - 21 The arrangement of “Luşi Birapa” on Topaloğlu’s 2000 album *Aravani* also clearly serves as the source for a rock version of the song by the group Karmate on their 2013 album *Zeni*; Karmate’s version uses the same arrangement of verses and melodies, adding electric and acoustic guitars, bass and drum set, while retaining the *kemençe* for interludes between the verses.
 - 22 The musicians Metin-Kemal Kahraman from Dersim in southeast Turkey have in a similar way published an album of field recordings, *Yaşlılar Dersim Türküleri Söylüyor*, making available source material they draw from in their studio albums. See the discussion in Neyzi (2002).
 - 23 Kolivar has published her research in the form of several articles and book chapters (e. g. Kolivar 2007, 2011, 2012).

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