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The Perception of The Laz People in *Ekşi Sözlük*: Patriotic, Intelligent and Humorous People

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ABSTRACT

In this study, the researchers have tried to determine what the perception of the Laz people by the Turkish society was. Although the ethnic origins of the Laz people in the past might be different; in the last millennium the Laz people have not only become culturally close to the Turks but also they have become ethnically united through marriages. In this process, the Laz people and Turks came to share the same religious and similar cultural codes and finally became relatives. Almost all Laz people in İstanbul and in other big cities have social, political and cultural integration with other Anatolian peoples, and this integration is evident in all its dimensions, even in Rize and Artvin, the homeland of the Laz people. In this study, the perception of the Laz people by the Turkish society was studied in 247 comments on the articles regarding the Laz people and the concept of Laz in *Ekşi Sözlük*. The entries were separated and analyzed as positive and negative comments. Consequently, it was understood that the perception of the Laz people by the Turkish society was predominantly positive and the Turkish people perceived the Laz people as patriotic, intelligent and humorous people.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Laz People, Social Perception, Laz Perception, Turkey, Ekşi Sözlük.

Ekşi Sözlükte Laz Algısı: Vatansever, Zeki ve Komik İnsanlar

ÖZ

Bu çalışmada Türk Toplumunun Laz algısının ne olduğu belirlenmeye çalışılmıştır. Lazlar Anadolu'nun kuzey-doğusunda yaşayan bir halktır. Lazların tarihi geçmişteki etnik kökeni farklı olabile de son bin yılda Lazlar Türklerle sadece kültürel olarak yaklaşmakla kalmamışlar, evlilikler yoluyla aynı zamanda etnik olarak da birleşmişlerdir. Bu süreçte Lazlarla Türkler aynı dini ve benzer kültürel kodları paylaşır hale gelmişler ve nihayet akraba olmuşlardır. İstanbul ve diğer büyük şehirlerdeki Lazların hemen hepsi diğer Anadolu halklarıyla sosyal, siyasal ve kültürel entegrasyona geçtikleri gibi, Lazların anavatanı konumundaki Rize ve Artvin'de bile bu entegrasyon hemen bütün boyutlarıyla belirgindir. Bu çalışmada Ekşi Sözlük'te *Laz* ve *Lazlar* maddelerine yazılan 247 yorumda Türk toplumunun Laz algısı çalışılmıştır. Girdiler olumlu ve olumsuz yorumlar olarak ayrılmış ve incelenmiştir. Sonuçta Türk toplumunun Laz algısının olumlu yönde ağırlık kazandığı ve onları vatansever, zeki ve komik insanlar olarak gördüğü anlaşılmıştır.

Keywords: Lazlar, Toplumsal Algı, Laz Algısı, Türkiye, Ekşi Sözlük.

1. Introduction

As it is the case in all countries, there are also various different social groups in Turkey at the subcultural level. The Laz people in Turkey are one of them and may be one of the most interesting ones. In this study the perceptions and thoughts of the citizens of the Republic of Turkey regarding the Laz people are analyzed. For this analysis, the necessary data set is obtained from *Ekşi Sözlük*.

The Laz people have spread and lived in the easternmost part of East Black Sea Region in sub provinces of Pazar and Çamlıhemşin of the province of Rize and some regions of the province of Artvin. Although it is indicated that their population ranges between 300 thousand and 1 million, the psychological spread of the concept of Laz is more far reaching. In many places of Turkey, the entire Eastern Black Sea Region, and even the Black Sea Region itself is characterized as composed of Laz people. In short, persons who moved or migrated from the Black Sea Region to other regions and cities of

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Turkey are described as the Laz (Alptekin, 2016; Sarı, 2017). Indeed, the Ottoman Empire described an administrative unit named *Lazistan* in Eastern Black Sea Region (Aleksiva, 2022). Perhaps this was done with reference to the fact that the expression of Laz, which has been valid since the Ottoman times, has been affiliated with the region or this administrative disposal has led to the affiliation of the expression of Laz to the region and perhaps this has allowed the reinforcement of this image.

In this study, the perceptions and opinions of the Turkish society regarding the expression of Laz and Laz people are classified, analyzed and interpreted by addressing the *Ekşi Sözlük* comments which have been made from 1999 until 2021. Although certain analyses have been conducted previously on the Gypsies, Chinese and Syrians by using the *Ekşi Sözlük* data, no analysis has been made regarding the Laz so far. In this regard, this study is the first one.

2. Method and Data Collection Techniques of the Study

In this study, the content analysis method has been used. Content analysis is a social science method that accepts newspapers, magazines, various written materials, and texts and inputs from the internet as data, and attempts to reveal the dominant message, purpose, and direction of the text by counting, frequency, and ratio of certain topics, messages, words, concepts, and symbols within specific categories and classifications (Aziz, 1990; Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2005). In accordance with this definition, comments under the “Lazlar” (Laz people) topic on *Ekşi Sözlük*, an online platform, were taken as data, classified, categorized, and recurring messages on specific topics were grouped together. Consequently, the weight of positive, negative, and neutral opinions about the Laz people by *Ekşi Sözlük* contributors was quantitatively derived and qualitatively interpreted and discussed.

On the other hand, the technique of obtaining the data of this study is a technique which is less frequently used, however it becomes popular increasingly. The data of this study is obtained by organizing the comments made under the articles of Laz and the Laz people in *Ekşi Sözlük* which is the oldest and the biggest online dictionaries in Turkey with open access*. *Ekşi Sözlük* is a cyber-dictionary and a website which is the product of the new media about all kinds of subject matters and concepts including the comments of registered writers in the style of a participatory dictionary. At *Ekşi Sözlük*, a total of 247 comments were made until 2021 regarding the two articles mentioned above, the oldest of which was made in 1999. This study is prepared based on the positive or negative classifications of the related comments in various categories (Gürel & Yakın, 2007).

It is believed that examining the comments on websites is much more efficient and healthy when compared to questionnaires and interviews, because beyond the fact that this choice makes it easier to have access to the related sample, its superior aspect when compared to questionnaires and interviews is the fact that the commentator does not make the comment upon the request of the researcher or the request or direction of an external factor just for the purpose of making a comment, but makes the comment by self-motivation and voluntarily in full as the commentator perceives doing this as a need. Therefore, the data may be regarded as the subjective opinions of the persons that are revealed in a free setting completely.

3. Regarding “Ekşi Sözlük” Which is the Source of Data

Ekşi Sözlük (2021a) which constituted the first example of the participatory dictionaries both in Turkey and around the world and became popular very fast after being established by Sedat Kapanoğlu in 1999, is a website which allows its registered users to freely express their opinions, make comments or provide information regarding any phenomenon, subject matter or person that they want without any limitation by using their nicknames (Gürel & Yakın, 2007). According to the current statistics included in the documentary which was prepared in 2019 especially for the 20th anniversary of *Ekşi Sözlük*, there are 115.852 authors in *Ekşi Sözlük* in total and there are also about 36 million entries created by those authors (Pena, 2019). *Ekşi Sözlük*, which labels itself as the “holy source of information” allows its every member to create an entry and make comments under those entries within the rules determined by it. The

* Ethics Committee Statement: Ethics committee permission is not required since there is no survey or interview study in the article and the data is open access over the internet.

comments included under the created entries may be in various different styles such as encyclopedic information, definition, comment, experience, observation, joke, humor, questionnaire, poem and lyrics; they may also include url links which are references to other online sources. Additionally, *Ekşi Sözlük* also allows making references to any other entry or comment in the dictionary with the links provided as “*bknz*” (“see”). The fact that new comments may be made for the entries created by the users allow the subject matter to remain current and contribute into the creation of an ever expanding comment pool in the dictionary and make *Ekşi Sözlük* an important source of reference (Gürel & Yakın, 2007, pp. 204-205). Indeed, the entered comments under the entries created by the authors in the dictionary have a great significance in terms of drawing a general framework regarding the mindset of the society and understanding the dominant trends regarding the subject matter.

Table 1. Ekşi Sözlük Statistics

Number of Authors	115.852
Number of Entries	35.133.544
Number of Monthly Single Users	35.759.823
Monthly Views	480.104.714

Source: (Pena, 2019)

4. Findings

The titles of “Laz” (Ekşi Sözlük, 2021b) and “Laz people” (Ekşi Sözlük, 2021c) are selected by the purposeful sampling technique among the entries in Ekşi Sözlük determined by the search engine on the website for the purpose of the research. Through the entries under the mentioned titles, the perception of the Turkish society towards the Laz people is subjected to examination through content analysis. There are 188 entries under the title of “Laz” while there are 59 entries under the title of “Laz people”. It was observed that the first entry under the title of “Laz” was made on the date of 11 December 1999, and the first entry under the title of “Laz people” was made at a relatively newer date which is 13 September 2011. It is striking that the authors of Ekşi Sözlük first inclined towards the abstract, concept, image and identity under the title of Laz and wrote texts about theory and definition, and later by the title of Laz people, they put the concrete aspect in their agendas which is the concrete view of the concept and started to create descriptive texts. If this approach is not incidental and this is also a trend which may be observed for other entries in Ekşi Sözlük, this may be well interpreted that the intellectual accumulation of the participants of this platform won over the populism of mass communication. Contrary to what is claimed and assumed, it may be thought that the approach of “means is message” is not an absolute reality and it may have gradual exceptions. Finally, in the study the entries that are created by the authors of Ekşi Sözlük who are still active under the titles of Laz and Laz people until August of 2021 were also included into the scope of the study. Additionally, the researchers also observed that the length of the comments in the entries varied between a few words or sentences and a few paragraphs except excerpts taken from other sources.

Table 2. Language of Shared Entries

	Number	Percentage
Turkish	245	99.2%
Lazuri	2	0.9%
Total	247	100%

When the language of the entries located under the titles of “Laz” and “Laz people” is considered, it would be seen that 99.2% of them are in Turkish, and 0.9% of them are in Lazuri. This situation may be interpreted in a manner that the Laz people prefer to express themselves in Turkish by moving from the assumption that most of the authors who wrote the entries were Laz. This interpretation is a compatible interpretation with the social integration, nation building and patriotism which will be emphasized below.

Table 3. State of Being Indicated as a Reference in the Entries

	Number	Percentage
No Reference Was Used	165	66.8%
Reference to another Title in Ekşi Sözlük	58	23.5%
Reference outside of Ekşi Sözlük	18	7.3%
Both	6	2.4%
Total	247	100%

In the content analysis, which was carried out regarding whether another reference is made to the related subject matter in the entries determined within the scope of the research, it was observed that the entries were mostly written (66.8%) without indicating any other source as a reference, and thusly most of the entries were unique. On the other hand, it was observed that the comments made in 23.5% of the contents were associated with another title or titles created in *Ekşi Sözlük*, and 7.3% of them were supported by a source which is outside of *Ekşi Sözlük*. Among the sources that are indicated as a reference outside of *Ekşi Sözlük*, the sources such as books, songs, news and website links are striking quantitatively. And the entries for which a title/source both inside and outside of *Ekşi Sözlük* are indicated as a reference constitute 2.4% of the total contents. The comments that indicate a reference to a source inside or outside of *Ekşi Sözlük* should not be thought as non-genuine. On the contrary, it may be thought that those comments were written with a methodological concern and may be more intellectual comments. Not using a reference emphasizes genuineness while making references emphasizes having sources and bases or being intellectual.

4.1. Characteristics of Expressions in Entries

Studying the Laz title on *Ekşi Sözlük* involves generating a sort of societal typology or concretizing this typology based on data from *Ekşi Sözlük* (See for related studies: Aydemir, 2016; Öztürk, 2018). The aim of this study is to establish a Laz typology by utilizing data from *Ekşi Sözlük*. 247 entries under the titles of “Laz” and “Laz people” in *Ekşi Sözlük* are divided into and studied under the categories of “Descriptive”, “Based on Conveyance”, “Positive”, “Negative” and “Other”. It was observed during the content analysis that the majority of the entries included more than one expression category. Therefore, in the event that there is more than one expression category in the same entry, those kinds of entries are separately included into each determined category and then analyzed accordingly. The categories that are determined within the scope of the analysis and the corresponding numbers and percentages are indicated in Table 4.

Table 4. Characteristics of Expressions in Entries

	Number	Percentage
Descriptive Expressions	106	38.5%
Expressions Based on Conveyance	20	7.2%
Positive Expressions	40	14.5%
Negative Expressions	29	10.5%
Other	80	29.0%

247 entries under the titles of “Laz” and “Laz people” in *Ekşi Sözlük* are basically divided into and studied under the categories of “Descriptive”, “Based on Conveyance”, “Positive”, “Negative” and “Other”. Out of all entries under the mentioned titles, it was evaluated that 106 of them (38.5%) were descriptive, 80 of them (29.0%) were other, 40 of them (14.5%) were positive, 29 of them (10.5%) were negative and 20 of them (7.2%) were based on conveyance. The entries in the descriptive category are evaluated to be the content which provided encyclopedic information regarding the Laz ethnic identity and were defining the Laz ethnic identity and displaying instructional characteristics. In the entries under the category of expressions based on conveyance, there are incidents, memories, jokes and similar texts that were personally experienced or heard regarding the Laz people. The entries in the positive category included positive comments regarding the Laz identity while the entries in the negative category included negative and critical entries regarding the Laz people. Lastly, the category of other included entries which

did not include any comment and provided a reference to another title in Ekşi Sözlük, which were not related to the mentioned title or were not included in any one of the determined categories and entries including swears or curses.

4.2. Descriptive Expressions

When the entries subjected to content analysis within the scope of the research are examined, it was revealed that the highest amount of comments included descriptive expressions (38.5%). Majority of those entries provided encyclopedic information regarding the Laz identity. It is possible to find the answers of questions in those entries such as “Who are the Laz people? Where do the Laz people live? Who are the ancestors of the Laz people? Which language do the Laz people speak?” and the like. For instance:

“Lazika people. Throughout history, the Lazika people maintained their freedom sometimes by having good relations with the Persians and sometimes by remaining as friends with the Romans; however they are also a people which suffered significantly. Their place of settlement is not the whole Black Sea Region; it is rather the region which is eastern part of Rize. Lazuri is a different language including words from many different languages such as Latin and Italian...” (K14, Laz 20.06.2001).

“It is a nation which established a state in the 7th century B.C. named Lazica and whose history goes back to the old times.” (K86, Laz people, 24.03.2012)

“It is the Caucasian people living in In the coastal region in the eastmost edge of the Black Sea, in the eastern part of Rize (beyond Çayeli) and in the coastal region of Artvin. The sub provinces of Pazar (Atina), Ardeşen, Fındıklı (Viçe), Arhavi and Hopa are considered as the motherland of the Laz people...” (K65, Laz people, 11.08.2017)

In addition to the expressions above, in the entries having descriptive statements, the authors clarified matters with an almost “complaining” rhetoric regarding the matters which are assumed as correct among the society, but actually are wrong. The first one of the wrong assumptions regarding the Laz identity mentioned by the authors of *Ekşi Sözlük*, is the idea that all people from Eastern Black Sea Region belong to the Laz ethnic identity. According to Avcı (2002, p. 7), (the basic reason of this confusion is the use of the concept of Laz as a regional label, not as an ethnic/cultural category which is different from the widespread cultural elements. The second reason is the insufficient information among the people about the characteristics of the language spoken by the Laz people and thusly the perception of Lazuri as a dialect of Turkish. As Kolivar (2006) indicated in her article titled “Language of Fadime and Temel”, it is believed by outside observers that it was easy to understand and imitate Lazuri. However, this idea does not reflect the reality because with its alphabet containing 35 letters, Lazuri is a language which cannot be spoken and understood by those who do not know the language at all. The third reason is that people recall kemancha rather than bagpipe when they talk about musical instruments of the Laz people. For instance:

“One thing that some people still can’t understand: Being from Eastern Black Sea Region does not necessarily mean being Laz.” (K15, Laz, 01.09.2001).

“... When it comes to other facts (experience), in fact the Laz people does not speak such as “*videyrum, geleyrum* / I am going, I am coming – [with an accent]”. They are a skewed version of the Black Sea dialect – as a joke in a way -. It may be very difficult to understand the language of a real Laz (There are Lazuri-Turkish dictionaries in the market). Therefore, it is due to somewhat ignorance and laziness to label all Black Sea folks as Laz people (especially people from Eastern Black Sea Region - Trabzon)” (K22, Laz, 28.07.2004).

“Besides Turkish spoken by the Laz people, there is also Lazuri, it is not just “*veldim, cittum* / I came, I went – [with an accent]” there is a separate language...” (K11, Laz, 11.12.1999).

“They are identified with the kemancha. However there are especially a lot of people who are born in Giresun and grow up with kemancha and they have nothing to do with being Laz, and there are also a lot of Laz people who have never seen or listened a live kemancha performance in their whole lives. I am calling on the authorities from here: the authentic instrument of the Laz people is the bagpipe before kemancha.” (K36, Laz, 13.01.2009).

“... We dance with the bagpipe, we don’t even think about the kemancha. The Laz people do not dance with the kemancha, indeed, they don’t even like it. Every person from the Black Sea Region is not a Laz. Do not deceive other people by saying that you are Laz. You are just from the Black Sea Region. If there is someone who claims that he/she is Laz, then he/she needs to speak Lazuri” (K70, Laz, 28.06.2018).

As it may be seen, some of the comments regarding the Laz identity in the entries are far away from historical facts and rather than being informative, they include hearsay and wrong information.

4.3. Expressions Based on Conveyance

20 entries included in the category of expressions based on conveyance include the personal memories of authors with persons having the Laz identity and the events/jokes that they heard from other persons or read from other sources. In the consequence of the analyses conducted regarding whether the event or situation included in the entries in this category is actually based on a real experience or hearsay information, it was concluded that 13 situations or incidents that are about the Laz people in the related entries were addressed in relation to an experience, and 7 of them were based on hearsay information or information read from some source.

“... It was June 28th on Friday, and around 3:00 in the afternoon, and there is a busy street, and an empty spot for one car but you may squeeze in there or not by an inch. After a few maneuvers, I heard a voice in the back: “*sa yap cel sa yap cell hooopp* – turn right and come, turn right and come, stop! [With an accent]” I had a smile on my face due to the accent, and I was able to park the car back and forth hardly in that tight spot. I get off the car and thanked the guy to my fellow townsman with a similar accent. He said you are welcome; he got into the car right in front of me and took off. Oh my God, the car in front of me was yours then why did I struggle so much just to park. Then people ask where the jokes about the Black Sea Region come from.” (K186, Laz, 02.07.2013).

“... For instance, I waited for a mechanic, who claimed to be Laz, to repair the trunk lid, and when the work was done, he said to me “they made the opening button of this trunk lid 5 centimeters down” and I almost died laughing. In fact, the mentioned opening button is a standard part which did not move from its place for 10 years.” (K193, Laz, 14.05.2008).

“... They are the people who I believe that their funny situations are in their natural character and in their genes. For instance: You go and visit your friend but you don’t know which floor your friend lives, you call your friend and ask for the floor number. You learn that it was the 3rd floor and you ring the doorbell. Later you continue the conversation over the intercom. My dear friend, just say “open the door” directly on the phone!...” (K177, Laz, 04.11.2007).

As it may be seen from the expressions above, the comments in this category reveal the funny, prankster and interesting aspects of the Laz people, who are thought to represent the generality of the people living in the Eastern Black Sea Region and who have frequently become the main characters of jokes of the Turkish folk literature, which became the subject matter of common jokes.

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4.4. Positive References Regarding Laz Identity

In some previously made studies, the people of the Eastern Black Sea Region, including the Laz people, were generally described as patriotic, nationalistic, hardworking, self-confident, and humorous. In the study that belongs to Alptekin and Cerit (2018) which is one of those studies, and whose data is obtained by questionnaires from students of Black Sea Technical University who come to the city outside of the Eastern Black Sea Region, the characteristic traits of people of the Eastern Black Sea Region in general and of Trabzon in particular appeared compatibly with the data of this study. The characteristic traits in the related study are nationalist (15.7%), patriotic (11.8%), courageous (13.7%), hardworking (11.4%), supporting fellow townsmen (9.4%) and outspoken (9%) respectively.

The data included in this study and obtained from *Ekşi Sözlük*, verify the previously made studies. Indeed, 40 entries in the positive expressions in *Ekşi Sözlük* were subjected to content analysis and the positive references in those expressions were determined and further separated into categories among them. It was revealed that the authors of *Ekşi Sözlük* used positive references regarding the Laz identity in 22 different categories. Those categories are included in Table 5.

Table 5. Positive References Regarding Laz Identity

Order No:	Positive Characteristic	Number	Order No:	Positive Characteristic	Number
1	Pleasant Sympathetic	3	12	Good Person Good-willed	2
2	Bright Quick Learner Smart Intelligent	8	13	Nationalist Loves Country Not Divisive Not Separatist	11
3	Funny Humorous Prankster Sense of Humor	4	14	Free Spirited	2
4	Reliable	1	15	Democrat	2
5	Hardworking	3	16	Man of His Words	1
6	Self-confident	3	17	Frank	2
7	Courageous	1	18	Hospitable	1
8	Educated Knowledgeable	2	19	Creative Inventor	2
9	At Peace With Oneself	1	20	Calms Down Fast	2
10	Cheerful	2	21	Warm-blooded	1
11	Unique	1	22	Has Good Genes	1

As it may be noticed in the listed positive references, it is seen that the category which was repeated the most (11 times) was “Nationalist / Loves Country / Not Divisive / Not Separatist”. The salience of this category in the positive references regarding the Laz identity is not incidental and the reason for this situation was explained in the following manner in one of the entries under the mentioned titles: “There is no other sub identity embracing the supra identity as much as them.” (K28, Laz, 18.04.2007). As it is seen in this comment and also indicated by Serdar (2015, p. 93), while many Laz people perceive themselves as having a different ethnic identity than their neighbors’ ethnic identity at the local level in certain aspects,

they perceive themselves in Turkish nationalism and Turkism in terms of embracing the Turkish nation, being Turkish and siding with Turkey and finally the political identity of the nation state. In other words, the Laz people position being Laz as a local culture, not as a national culture (Taşkın, 2016, p. 63) and this local culture for them is completed by being connected to the Turkish identity. As Ernest Renan stated, *nation is an everyday plebiscite* and the Laz people are connected with the national through bringing forward their local characteristics by jokes and various similar narratives at the national level every day and thusly they are integrated with the national. Although the Laz people are criticized and blamed by some of the *Ekşi Sözlük* authors for losing their identity and even being assimilated due to their positioning in terms of the Turkish identity, they are deemed worthy of praise by some authors. The following statements are examples for the latter:

“...The fact that they are not divisive and they protect their language and culture needs to be appreciated...” (K126, Laz, 13.03.2005).

“... I don’t know why, but they live long and they love the country and the reason for this situation is very clear.” (K8, Laz, 21.05.2004).

“... They are loyal to the homeland, I have never seen a separatist Laz but if they see a separatist Laz, they take care of the situation, they have such a habit. However it is a place where one can live fabulously, it has water, beaches, ports, all of that, but the Laz people do not want to get separated and do not say that their freedoms were restricted...” (K142, Laz, 14.01.2017).

Additionally, in the entries under those categories, it is striking that the Laz identity is compered by the authors of *Ekşi Sözlük* with the Southeastern identity which is another local component of the Turkish nation and by comparison, the Laz identity is glorified. In the comments in the entries, while the Laz people are glorified, it is striking that the indicated examples included justifications such as their love for the homeland, nationalistic attitudes and the fact that they are not separatist. The following statements are examples of this situation:

“...The Laz people are concerned about earning their living, experiencing their culture and living their lives to the fullest extent... They have no concern for establishing a Lazistan Republic. I know many Laz people who are involved with politics, none of them are separatists. If a Laz becomes a separatist like a ..., first other Laz people laugh at him/her. The Laz people speak Lazuri, but they do not dream about having education in a high school lecturing in Lazuri. Sometimes, the Laz people are separated from their lands due to economic problems, but they do not revolt because of that, they work and then return to their villages. The Laz people may not like the government and the manner of administering the state affairs, but for this reason they do not become ...; they vote; they express their thoughts; they try to change what is out there...” (K130, Laz, 28.06.2010).

“The Laz people do not hide the fact that they were Laz, it is okay, this is also necessary, but first they manage to say that they were Turks.” (K129, Laz, 28.06.2010).

“We cannot fully say that the Laz people are Kurds living by the side of the sea, because they do not betray the state... Also, the Laz people who migrate to the Aegean and Mediterranean regions do not fail to adapt to their environment and do not upset peace there like the ...” (K146, Lazlar, 07.01.2016).

Among the positive references regarding the Laz identity the category of “Bright / Quick Learner / Smart / Intelligent (8 times)” comes in the second place. The striking point in the entries in this category is the fact that the comments regarding that the Laz people were smart and intelligent were made with a stance which expressed “what is contrary to the popular belief”. In that case, the first question that comes to mind is the question of which characteristics the typology carries when we talk about the Laz people. The answer of this question lies in the representation of the Laz typology that we encounter frequently in the traditional Turkish theatre, jokes or contemporary series/movies. The Laz typology that we frequently encounter especially in the jokes is a typology that cannot reason, communicate correctly with the interlocutor or does not allow the interlocutor to speak (Aksamaz, 2014). The Laz, who is occasionally mocked due to those characteristics, is laughed at by everyone around. However, the real reason for everyone to laugh at the Laz lies in the characteristics of “being feeble-minded”, because “as the minds of

the Laz people work completely different than those of other people, they are described by a characteristic stupidity that would allow their behavior to deviate from what is reasonable” (Aksoy Sheridan, 2007, p. 97). In a similar manner, Taşkın (2006) states that the expression of Laz no longer means a name, it has turned into an adjective which is used as “being feeble-minded” or “illogical”. In fact, due to this reason, the Laz people are always expected to display a “feeble-minded” or “illogical” act or attitude. However, contrary to this widespread opinion, the authors of *Eksi Sözlük* point out that the Laz people are smarter and more intelligent than what is indicated or known. For instance:

“...Contrary to what is known, we may say that the Laz people, who have a witty character, have a very wide local culture” (K1, Laz people, 03.01.2016).

“It is a group of people who have a wittier mind than what is displayed in the series or movies...” (K125, Laz, 14.01.2009).

“Their most salient characteristics is their cleverness which works for all affairs...” (K8, Laz, 21.05.2004).

“... They are brave, true to word, humorous, quick learner and smart people” (K10, Laz, 27.05.2004).

The third positive reference category of “Funny / Humorous / Prankster / Sense of Humor” (4 times) points out the humorous aspect of the persons with the Laz identity.

“To begin with, they have a high sense of humor. They greatly make fun of each other and also of other people...” (K142, Laz, 14.01.2017).

“... I am pretty sure that they are the people whose humorous state is in their natural characteristics and genes...” (K177, Laz, 04.11.2007).

“It is a group of friendly people who are known for their courage, industriousness, jokes, inventions, famous dialect that everyone likes...” (K121, Laz, 01.01.2010).

On the other hand, in the table of positive references, it is seen that the Laz people were described as “pleasant/sympathetic (3 times)”, “hardworking (3 times)”, “self-confident (3 times)”, “educated/knowledgeable (2 times)”, “cheerful (2 times)”, “good person/good-willed”, “free spirited (2 times)”, “democrat (2 times)”, “frank (2 times)”, “creative/inventor (2 times)”, “calms down fast (2 times)”. Additionally, the expressions of “trustworthy”, “courageous”, “at peace with oneself”, “unique”, “man of his words”, “hospitable”, “warm-blooded” and “with good genes” are used for the Laz people.

4.5. Negative References Regarding Laz Identity

In the abovementioned study of Alptekin and Cerit (2018), the negative characteristics of the people especially from Trabzon and from the Eastern Black Sea Region in general were listed as follows: hasty (17.6%), nervous (17.3%), narrow-minded, (13.7%), blunt (13.7%), impetuous (12.2%) and uses obscene words and swears (11.8%). The data that this study obtained from *Eksi Sözlük* corresponded well with the literature. Indeed, 29 entries in the negative categories regarding the Laz people in *Eksi Sözlük* were subjected to content analysis and the negative references in those expressions were determined and later separated into categories. It was revealed that the authors of *Eksi Sözlük* used negative references regarding the Laz identity in 19 different categories. Those categories are included in Table 6.

Table 6. Negative References Regarding Laz Identity

Order No:	Negative Characteristics	Number	Order No:	Negative Characteristics	Number
1	Overhasty	2	11	Ignorant	1
2	Obstreperous	1	12	Nationalist	2
3	Loud-voiced	2	13	Unthankful	1
4	Interesting	1	14	Insistent	1
5	Stubborn	4	15	Nervous Tense	3
6	Hardheaded	3	16	Likes concrete Massacres nature Loves nature (!)	4
7	Dangerous Prone to crime Belligerent	4	17	Hyperactive Restless	2
8	Hot-blooded Short tempered Gets carried away easily	3	18	Mean	1
9	Combative Moody	3	19	Reactionary	1
10	Rebellious	1			

As it may be seen in the listed negative references, it was seen that the categories of (4 times) “Likes concrete / Massacres nature / Loves nature (!)”, “Stubborn” and “Dangerous / Prone to crime / Belligerent” were used most frequently. In the comments in the category of “Likes concrete / Massacres nature / Loves nature (!)”, the authors accused the Laz people for their failure to protect the nature and to live in harmony with the nature. Indeed, it is seen that the authors based their claims on the activity of the Laz people in the construction sector. For example:

“The ethnic group which invaded Istanbul for the first time and increased the fear of an earthquake among us with the buildings that they made...” (K154, Laz, 14.10.2004).

“They know that they live in one of the most beautiful places around the world, however they do not refrain from massacring or polluting the nature which they admire...” (K7, Laz, 02.05.2018)

“They have lived in harmony with the nature. It is bogus. While most contractors are among the Laz people and the people from the Eastern Black Sea Region, if you mention this fact, they beat you up without asking any question.” (K164, Laz people, 25.05.2017).

“It is a race which took an oath for collectively destroying a county for the love of money, for turning this country into hell and it is a race which is ravenous...” (K165, Laz people, 05.08.2021).

On the other hand, the following words in an entry under the mentioned titles indicate that the real source of the allegations should not be the Laz people and the wrong impression that people assume all people from the Eastern Black Sea Region were Laz people caused a wrongful generalization in this manner: “It is the ethnic group which is blamed for filling the whole country with concrete by those who assume that all people from the Eastern Black Sea Region were Laz people. Ignorance is a bad thing” (K103, Laz people, 06.08.2021). The prevalence of construction business in the Eastern Black Sea Region, especially in Trabzon is revealed in conducted studies.¹ However, there is no information regarding that those individuals belong to the Laz ethnic group. When it is considered that among the regions where the Laz people predominantly live (Fındıklı, Ardeşen, Pazar, Çamlıhemşin sub provinces of Rize and Hopa, Arhavi and Borçka sub provinces of Artvin), Trabzon ranked behind, we may conclude that those contractors do not belong to the Laz ethnic identity. As a contrary reality, the in their localities, the Laz people mostly became the voice of environmentalist movements by taking part in environmentalist social movements, and so far they continue to do so. With the slogans of “Say Stop to the Green Route!”, “Quit While the Road is Still Green!” and “Green Route is Dark Life!”, the Laz people committed to become defenders of the nature by rising against the project named the “Green Route” which went into effect in

¹ Alptekin and Karyelioğlu’s study (2015) is among the significant studies about this matter.

2014 and was planned to connect the Eastern Black Sea highlands with each other (Kural, 2015). In fact, the nature lovers who gathered for the purpose of opposing the mentioned project established the group named Storm Initiative (*Fırtına İnisiyatifi*) and they have been continuing their activities under its umbrella. Besides, the people of Fındıklı rose against the initiative to build a hydroelectricity power plant in Fındıklı, which is one of the sub provinces where the Laz people predominantly live, and they organized various protests, signed petitions and maintained their struggle in the legal area (Çavuşoğlu, 2011). In fact, the campaign, which the people of the region initiated, has become the subject matter of the documentary named “A Handful of Courageous People (*Bir Avuç Cesur İnsan*)” (Vardar, 2011).

Among the negative references to the Laz identity, the category of “Dangerous / Prone to crime / Belligerent (4 times)” is in the second rank.

“... thank you and may you live longer, however they are dangerous people, many of them carry weapons and use weapons without thinking, this is not certainly for defensive purposes...” (K154, Laz, 14.10.2004).

“... the Laz people are praised by stupid descriptions by ethnic romantics, who cannot place the other in the place of someone, such as Laz-chopath and Laz-ripper so that the Laz people are prone to violence because they are a state within the state just like other communities in the region.” (K163, Laz, 22.08.2021).

“I tend to relate reason/intelligence to the anchovy and impatience and stubbornness to the geography. Also, there is also the subject matter of being belligerent and I think it is more about socio-economic reasons...” (K144, Laz people, 13.10.2017).

The negative reference category in the third rank highlights the “Stubborn (4 times)” character of the individuals with the Laz ethnic identity.

“It is a people to which my maternal origin is related and who generally live in Rize and Artvin and the surrounding areas, and are pleasant but stubborn people who like to act in an unruly manner” (K134, Laz people, 24.12.2013).

“About ninety percent of all Laz people whom I have met so far have been impatient, stubborn and smart people...” (K144, Laz people, 13.10.2017).

“... they are stubborn. We have been unable to solve this problem :) By knowing this issue, I have tried to educate myself a lot, I believe that I have displayed improvement, however there are still some people who tell me that I am stubborn :)...” (K142, Laz, 14.01.2017).

In addition to the abovementioned negative references, it has been observed that the Laz people have been described as “hardheaded (3 times)”, “hot-blooded / short tempered / gets carried away easily (3 times)”, “nervous / tense (3 times)”, “combative / moody (3 times)”, “over hasty (2 times)”, “loud-voiced (2 times)”, “nationalist (2 times)” and “hyperactive / restless (2 times)”. Additionally, the expressions of “obstreperous”, “rebellious”, “interesting”, “ignorant”, “insistent”, “unthankful”, “mean” and “reactionary” have also been used for the Laz people. The striking matter in the table of negative references is the fact that the expression of “nationalism”, which is striking in the table of positive references, also takes place in this table. However, while the Laz people were admired for their nationalism in the entries there, the Laz people were criticized by the authors in the table of negative references. For instance:

“Contrary to what people generally believe, the Laz people which are characterized as the secret enemy, have a weak aspect, which is supposing their ethnic identity as Turkish. In fact, many Laz people, young or old, refrain from stating that they were Laz people or hide this identity under Turkishness as a local cultural element. The nationalism policy which is applied in their locality has permeated them so much so that they perceive being Laz as a minor tradition and they reject their own ethnic identity. They reject it so far as they may state “we are within Turkishness” ...” (K173, Laz people, 26.03.2012).

“There are individuals among them who are swamped with nationalism and reactionism, so that they may blame the Alawites, who are originally Turks and who have become Muslims way before the Laz people, for being infidels and not Turks.” (K174, Laz people, 6.10.2012).

The matter which needs to be finally mentioned is the opinions of the authors of *Eksi Sözlük* regarding whether the Laz ethnic identity has been assimilated or not. It is possible to divide the opinions of the authors in the mentioned subject matter basically in two categories: While the first opinion accepts the opinion that the Laz people have been assimilated (5 authors), the second opinion claims that the Laz people have not been assimilated (1 author). The following are examples for each opinion:

“Not long, may be after one or two generations, there will be nobody around speaking Lazuri, but there are some people who defend even this, claim that this was something good and think that they have not been assimilated” (K83, Laz, 15.12.2020).

“They have not been assimilated. Since they are in the nation state, they have the Turkish identity... There is no limitation for them to speak or learn Lazuri. Since they also know that it would not be logical to make a language appealing to 50 or 100 thousand people as the language of instruction at schools or the official language, many Laz people do not have such a demand in this matter...” (K82, Laz, 15.12.2020).

The commenters, who accept the general opinion that the Laz people have been assimilated, have disagreements among themselves. While one of the commenters stated that the Laz people voluntarily assimilated, another commenter indicated that the Laz people were assimilated by the state. Besides those opinions, there was also another commenter who stated that the Laz people had to assimilate because their number was few and also there was another commenter who stated that the Laz people assimilated because they migrated. It is important to state that both commenters voiced those claims had the Laz ethnic identity. For instance:

“It is a group of Anatolian people who displayed one of the most characteristic examples of voluntary assimilation. The situation is that even in the villages people started not speaking Lazuri... In fact, they do not speak Lazuri because they are concerned about being ridiculed in places other than the sub provinces of Pazar, Ardeşen, Fındıklı, Arhavi and Hopa. Embrace your language at least in those sub provinces!...” (K96, Laz people, 13.10.2016).

“It is an assimilated and dead ethnic group to which I partially belong. It is an identity, language and culture that the assimilation and securitization policies of Turkey erased from history” (K81, Laz, 30.09.2020).

“The number of Mohti (Laz) people in the Black Sea Region has never reached several hundred thousand anytime. Therefore, it would not be fair to talk about a state sanctioned assimilation. They are not assimilated, because their number is few...” (K97, Laz people, 14.10.2016).

“We got assimilated, my family moved from the town of Sarp of Batum to Sapanca region and this happened approximately in 1910. We don’t speak Lazuri right now. My knowledge of Lazuri consists of only a few words and it is only sufficient to understand the topic of conversation. It is very rare for migrant Laz people to lose their language and identity” (K84, Laz, 15.12.2020).

The voluntary assimilation claim may be associated with the concept of spatial mysticism within the context of nation building. The concept of *Spatial Mysticism* is a concept which is mentioned by Michael Billig (2002, p. 92) in his book titled *Banal Nationalism*, explained, interpreted and detailed by Alptekin and Amanet (2019) in their article within the context of the Black Sea Region. In the literature, the sense of belonging for the birthplace or the lands that a person may call “my homeland” is called as *topophilia* with its meanings which may be called love of or loyalty towards homeland (Tuan, 1974; Bachelard, 2013) and a spatial mysticism is created around this love. This concept may be described as encountering everything and enduring all kinds of difficulties for the love of homeland. Those difficulties include acting harmoniously and revealing differences by integrating with what is larger for the purpose of living peacefully in the hometown. Here, this concept may be revised as *regional* or *hometown mysticism*. In fact, the resemblance of spatial, homeland or city mysticism, which may be determined among the people from the Black Sea Region in general, and among the Laz people in particular, is not observed that much salient in the peoples of other regions. Many examples of this approach, which is about the fact that the land in the region is narrow, scarce and valuable, may be found in the Black Sea Region, and the Laz people are included in those examples.

In general, the autochthonous people of the Black Sea Region, and the Laz people among them do not see a problem in embracing each new political formation with the psychology of autochthonism provided by living in this reason for long centuries and may be for thousands of years, and thusly their right to live, regional position and prestige are more important and prioritized than emphasizing the difference of local identity from the supra identity. Although, embracing each new political formation is characterized today as assimilation or voluntary assimilation, for the Laz people, protection of traditional physical space and maintaining the right to live in this space is more important and prioritized. Continuance of the historical space on which the Laz people live as the living space today is located on the top levels when compared to emphasizing the difference of local identity in the hierarchy of needs, and the people of the region legitimize this preference and prioritization in their daily lives through *spatial mysticism*. The “voluntary assimilation” opinion and conceptualization of the *Ekşi Sözlük* authors regarding the Laz people remain in the background as an unimportant detail besides protecting the living spaces descended from the ancestors of the autochthonous people of the region; and the people of the region embrace an implicit integration with the supra identity as the guarantee for protecting their local identity, language, folklore and above all their physical living spaces. In the final analysis, the Laz people embrace spatial mysticism for the purpose of being able to protect their traditional physical living spaces, praise and glorify the living spaces in the Black Sea Region and in this context, they create a spatial mysticism, and through the mediation of this creation, they integrate with the national more easily and provide a specific original contribution to the nation building within the context of *nationalism of the Laz people*.

5. Conclusion

When the comments in *Ekşi Sözlük* are considered, we observe that there is a wide range of comments regarding the Laz people. Just like it is the case for all titles, here we have positive and negative comments. However, we observed that the positive comments come to the fore in terms of their numbers and gravity. The salient opinions of the *Ekşi Sözlük* authors regarding the Laz people are about the patriotism, intelligence and humorous aspects of the Laz people.

The socio-political positions, stances and patriotism of the Laz people in the Republic of Turkey in this context need to be explained by relating those characteristics with the concepts of nation, nationalism and nation building of the modern state. The Laz people living in Turkey provide the most typical examples of being a nation and nation building in the world. An important outcome that may be deducted from the patriotism emphasis of the comments in *Ekşi Sözlük* regarding the Laz people is that the Laz people are the most typical examples and the most successful component of the Turkish nation building process. The Laz people are an autochthonous people of Anatolia, a dynamic subject of the imperial periods and the brightest component of the nation building process of the Republic of Turkey. The fact that the Laz identity does not ignore its local culture, language, behavioral patterns but acts in an absolute harmony with the supra identity in day-to-day politics and at the level of national identity and does not have any reservations allowed the Laz people to become the most important example of the Turkish nation building process. As it is also mentioned in the comments, the Laz people speak their language however they do not expect to receive education in this language or to defend themselves in courts with this language. They learn the official language of the country enthusiastically, recognize it as their own language, take part in the national life through this language and embrace the national symbols and identity enthusiastically. While the emphasis placed by the Laz people on their local language, culture and symbols is completely apolitical, their identity at the level of national politics is intertwined with the national identity and the supra Turkish identity without any reservations. It is the most basic characteristics of the nation building process for what is local to be apolitical, and for what is political to match the national; and the Laz people in Turkey provide the best example of this formula. This example is the candidate to become one of the best and most successful examples of nation building processes in the world.

In the comments, the second important characteristic regarding the Laz people is that they are intelligent. It is indicated that the Laz people have a sharp and witty intelligence. We encounter this intelligence as a tool providing a practical ease in the daily life and a method providing high revenues in

the economic life. In the comments, the witty intelligence of the Laz people is mentioned alongside their ability to joke. In fact, the third and the most prominent characteristics of the Laz people is that they are humorous. Above all, the classical Laz typology is intelligent and funny and those two characteristics are combined in the Laz jokes which are also known as Temel jokes (Temel used to be a common male name which was mostly used by the Laz people and the people from the Eastern Black Sea Region). There is no doubt that the typology in Temel jokes is a Laz typology. The Temel jokes, with their humorous and thought provoking intelligence, are cultural products that reveal the humorous character of the Laz people and connect what is local to what is national.

The Ekşi Sözlük participants and commenters reveal pretty open, understandable comments, opinions and criticisms in almost all matters which may successfully provide the essence of any matter. The analysis of the Ekşi Sözlük Comments is believed to be a well-directed effort for the purpose of understanding what people in Turkey think about the Laz people. Many comments have been made regarding the Laz people in Ekşi Sözlük; however the most striking comments are about the fact that the Laz people are patriotic, intelligent and humorous people.

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Yazarların çalışmadaki katkı oranları Musa Yavuz ALPTEKİN %50/ Sümeyye YAZICI %50 şeklindedir.
The authors' contribution rates in the study are Musa Yavuz ALPTEKİN %50/ Sümeyye YAZICI %50 form.

Çıkar Çatışması Beyanı / Conflict of Interest

Çalışmada herhangi bir kurum veya kişi ile çıkar çatışması bulunmamaktadır.
There is no conflict of interest with any institution or person in the study.

İntihal Politikası Beyanı / Plagiarism Policy

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Bilimsel Araştırma ve Yayın Etiği Beyanı / Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Statement

Bu çalışmada Yükseköğretim Kurumları Bilimsel Araştırma ve Yayın Etiği Yönergesi kapsamında belirtilen kurallara uyulmuştur.
In this study, the rules specified within the scope of the Higher Education Institutions Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Directive were followed.

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