

Title: “Burgazada of Istanbul: Exploring coexistence and social memory via oral history in a multi-faith, multi-ethnic island”

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Abstract:

The central concern of my DPhil research is to explore the ways in which people from different backgrounds negotiate their personal and collective self-understandings and engage in practices of coexistence in communities characterized by differences in class, ethnicity and religion in Turkey. The Princes islands of Istanbul are home to Jews, Armenians, Rums (Greek-Orthodox living in Turkey), Catholics, Suryanis, Sunnis, Alawis and Kurds. My research is grounded in an exploration of the historical and regional background of Turkey’s current political situation, the critical historical and political events that have over time affected minorities’ awareness of categories of ethnicity, class and religion. I seek to document the ways in which the Princes Islanders remember the homogenisation of the country from the nation building stage until present. I will investigate the ways in which the memories of the past, both bitter and sweet, are recalled as well as being manifested in physical objects (e.g. photos, diaries, letters, gifts, clothing). I want to understand how these mental and material forms and practices of memory affect identities and interactions among different ethnic, class and religious groups. Through examining social memory via oral history, I seek to explore the extent to which people on the Princes Islands categorise themselves as belonging to a particular class, ethnicity and religion as well as their awareness and occasions of transgression of these categories of differences.

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