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Article – Open section

Representing and rekindling conviviality
The role of Burgaz islanders' media productions in resilience, solidarity, and reunion

Deniz Neriman Duru[1]

1. Department of Communication, Lund University, deniz.duru@iko.lu.se

Abstract

This article examines how Burgaz islanders use media productions – novels, memoirs, documentaries, and interview-based books – to represent and rekindle conviviality, resilience, and solidarity in response to political crises and forced migration within a post-Ottoman homogenising context. By combining media studies and anthropology, I analyse narratives and representations in these media productions, conduct expert interviews with authors and documentary producers, and juxtapose these findings with long-term ethnographic research. The role of media produced by Burgaz islanders is threefold: 1) representing conviviality, solidarity, and diversity as an ebru (marbling)-like pattern, serving as a pillar of a strong, cohesive, and resilient community in times of political crisis; 2) critiquing nationalism and homogenisation processes; and 3) serving as a collective healing mechanism that fosters hope for reuniting the dispersed islanders.

Keywords

Conviviality, crisis, migration, diversity, media production, resilience

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Introduction

Burgaz, one of the Princes' Islands of Istanbul, is home to a diverse population representing more than twenty different ethnic, religious, linguistic, and socio-economic backgrounds. Following the nation-building efforts of modern Turkey and the worsening international relations between Turkey and Greece over Cyprus, successive Turkish governments implemented restrictive and oppressive policies targeting both recognised and unrecognised minorities. While some of the island's inhabitants, primarily non-Muslims (e.g., Greek Orthodox, Jewish, and Armenian communities), left the island, others – including Alevis, Kurds from Anatolia, as well as Jewish, Suryani, and Sunni Muslim communities from Istanbul – settled there.

This article explores Burgaz islanders' media productions in representing and rekindling conviviality as a means of reuniting a dispersed community. Burgaz is chosen as a case study because its inhabitants have resisted various political crises to preserve its Byzantine and Ottoman diversity, despite nation-building and homogenisation processes. In the aftermath of politically repressive periods (such as homogenisation policies and coup d'états), the early 2000s saw the emergence of publicly expressed repressed memories and marginalised identities through a plethora of popular culture productions, including TV series, films, documentaries, and novels. This period also coincides with the media productions of Burgaz islanders, who emphasised their memories of conviviality, resistance, resilience, and solidarity in response to public and state violence. Since the early 2000s, Burgaz islanders have written novels and produced documentaries, distributing them on YouTube and Vimeo, and launched a Facebook group dedicated to reuniting those who left Turkey due to various political crises. Through these media productions, Burgaz islander authors and documentary-makers articulate memories of conviviality, narrate collective acts of solidarity, and document instances of resistance during several crises, such as the 1955 pogrom. During this event, when Muslim rioters attacked the stores and homes of non-Muslims in Istanbul and other Princes' Islands, Burgaz islanders collaborated with the local police to prevent attackers from reaching the island.

This article seeks to answer the following questions: How do Burgaz islanders represent diversity, solidarity, and conviviality in their media productions? What role do these media productions play in coping with the consequences of homogenisation and political crises that led to emigration from Burgaz? In line with De Genova (2018), Sahin-Mencutek et al. (2022), and Seuferling et al. (2024), I do not conceptualise migration as an isolated event constituting a crisis, but rather as a governance crisis encompassing multiple dimensions. This perspective necessitates an exploration of the interplay between actors (local, national, transnational, and supranational), policies (border control, migration regulation), and narratives (discursive frames, media representations) (Sahin-Mencutek et al., 2022; De Genova, 2018).

The contribution of this article is twofold. First, I approach migration not only as a consequence of political crises at national and international levels but also as an outcome

of a long-term process of othering (see De Genova, 2018), which led to the forced or voluntary departure of non-Muslim minorities from Turkey. Hence, I situate this research within a post-Ottoman homogenising context, where nation-building processes, both during and after the empire's collapse, sought to forge "homogeneous" nations through population displacements and restrictive policies. This study documents the impact of international and national policies, as well as critical historical events, on the lives of minorities in Turkey, particularly in reshaping the demographic landscape of Burgaz Island.

Secondly, by employing conviviality as a theoretical framework, I examine how islanders represent conviviality, diversity, and solidarity in their literary and filmic media productions, as well as how they engage with these productions through book launches, documentary screenings, and reunions linked to these media. I explore the role of locally produced media in helping a diverse community cope with the consequences of political crises that led to migration flows and in their efforts to rekindle conviviality. Furthermore, I explore the role of media produced by Burgaz islanders in three key dimensions: 1) representing conviviality, solidarity, and diversity as an *ebru* (marbling)-like pattern (Figure 1), which serves as a pillar of a strong, cohesive, and resilient community in times of political crisis; 2) critiquing nationalism and homogenisation processes; and 3) serving as a collective healing mechanism that fosters hope for reuniting the dispersed islanders.

This article argues that the islanders produce media to criticise the oppressive and discriminatory policies of Turkish governments, to recall memories of conviviality, and foster a collective healing process with the hope of reunion – a hope that was ultimately fulfilled. Through producing these media, reading novels, attending book launches, watching documentaries, engaging in discussions about these productions, and organising reunions around media-launch events, the islanders construct a shared rhetoric and a collective island identity that values diversity.

This research is grounded in 15 years of ethnographic and longitudinal study (2008-2023) and builds on media anthropology, media ethnography, and media and cultural studies (see Barker, 2012; Lewis, 2008; Pertierra, 2018; Schrøder et al., 2003; Tufte, 2000; Iordanova, 2001). In this research, I analysed the representation of diversity, solidarity, and conviviality in Burgaz islanders' media productions (documentaries, novels, and memoirs), conducted expert interviews (Bruun, 2016) with authors and documentary producers, and juxtaposed these findings with casual conversations, participant observation, and interviews with islanders. Narratives in media productions "draw on socially shared ideas about the world, people, and events" (Hansen & Machin, 2013, p. 159). While the primary material for this article comes from media narratives and expert interviews, the ethnographic material serves as a complementary source, aiding in triangulation and cross-checking the relationship between media productions and islanders' memories and everyday life (what they do/did, with what, and how they represent).

Figure 1: Ebru/marbling by Can Duru, who gave his consent to use his ebru in this publication.

Having introduced the methodology and methods, this article will first present the literature and the theoretical framework and then the chosen empirical material upon which this study is built. It will then outline the historical and political contexts that intensified homogenisation efforts, before illustrating in the final section how the empirical material produced by the islanders demonstrates the role of these media productions as resilience mechanisms in response to various political crises that led to migration flows and as means for restoring conviviality through their reunion story.

Conviviality in times of crisis: The role of popular culture productions in showing solidarity and resilience

Hermes (2024) emphasises the importance of listening to popular culture productions to understand everyday meaning-making, place-making, and societies' resilience and strengths in the face of various challenges and crises. Through the notion of cultural citizenship, popular culture helps foster a sense of belonging, as well as emotional and affective attachment. These productions enable people to construct inclusive identities and build civic connections while responding to discrimination, inequality, societal divisions, and exclusion (Hermes, 2024). To explore the islanders' resistance to homogenisation, othering, anti-minority discourses, and nationalism that led to emigration from Burgaz, I draw on literature examining the role of popular culture in expressing solidarity, empathy, and resilience during political crises.

Images and narratives in documentaries and films about incoming refugees from the Middle East and Africa in 2015-2016, depicting their journeys, arrival, and settlement (Hiltunen, 2019; Horsti, 2019), moved audiences to feel empathy toward distant others and sufferers (Boltanski, 1999; Chouliaraki, 2006, 2013). These representations contributed to building cosmopolitan solidarity and constructing transnational memories that shape the future (Horsti, 2019). In another context, Volčič (2007) examined the concept of Yugo-nostalgia, exploring the restorative, reflective, and critical aspects of nostalgic cultural productions such as films, music, and reality TV shows. His research highlighted how a wide range of media representations played a role in constructing exclusive, national, homogeneous identities in opposition to the internal diversity within multi-ethnic Yugoslavia (Volčič, 2007, p. 24). While Yugo-nostalgia had the potential to heal, build new inclusive identities, and encourage peaceful coexistence, it also carried the risk of obscuring the destructive effects of nationalism (Volčič, 2007, p. 34). Burgaz islanders' media productions across different genres (novels, memoirs, interview-based books, and documentaries) are reflective, reflexive, and constructive in shaping a collective Burgaz identity (Hall, 1997, pp. 24-25; Nichols, 2017, p. 22). In this article, I have chosen and analysed all the media produced by the islanders in these genres to examine both the critical role of local media productions in countering homogenisation and their healing and connective functions. Building on Hermes (2024) and Volčič (2007), I examine how media productions do

not merely represent distant suffering (Boltanski, 1999) or welcome sufferers but instead depict *suffering together across distances*. This is evident in the ways islanders resisted nationalism and othering by recalling memories of conviviality and hoping for the reunion of separated islanders.

Thus, this article investigates the hopes, limitations, and potential of Burgaz islanders' media productions across various genres in their efforts to reunite a dispersed community. I use conviviality as a framework for living together in diversity despite homogenisation policies, political crises, and turmoil in Turkey to critique multiculturalism and cosmopolitanism (see Duru, 2024). Political theories on multiculturalism, such as liberal multiculturalism (Kymlicka, 1995, 2010), politics of recognition (Taylor, 1992/1994), and mosaic multiculturalism (Joppke & Lukes, 1999), emphasise the recognition of differences (e.g., ethnic, linguistic, religious) as a basis for securing equality and rights, perceiving society as a mosaic of different groups. This approach has been criticised by Eriksen (2001), Cowan (2006), and Duru (2015, 2024), who argue that it risks undermining shared experiences among society members by defining culture solely through difference. Sociologists and anthropologists studying interactions in diverse communities have explored everyday practices of living with difference, proposing concepts such as everyday multiculturalism (Wise, 2010; Wise & Velayutham, 2009), cosmopolitan belonging (Jones & Jackson, 2014), and conviviality (Gilroy, 2004; Neal et al., 2019; Nowicka & Vertovec, 2014; Wise & Noble, 2016).

Conviviality, as joint-shared life, places shared and collective life at its core, exploring how people from different ethnic, religious, and linguistic backgrounds coexist, share space, and manage tensions and conflicts (Karner & Parker, 2011; Neal et al., 2019). While cosmopolitanism emphasises engagement with the Other, individual interactions, and encounters with difference (Hannerz, 1990; Radice, 2016), conviviality embeds collectivity, a sense of togetherness, and rootedness in a diverse community (Duru, 2024) while also addressing the resolution of conflicts. My 15 years of longitudinal and ethnographic research (2008-2023) in Burgaz have led to the conceptualisation of conviviality as both the embodiment and internalisation of diversity in the production and reproduction of space and a sense of belonging through shared ways of living (see Duru, 2024). Conviviality incorporates both sociable sociality in the form of amicable relations, enjoyment of company, pleasurable moments – how islanders enjoy, practice, perform, and value living together in diversity – as well as the management of tensions and conflicts in everyday life and during times of crisis. Unlike multicultural theories that emphasise non-interference and side-by-side living, conviviality is active and performative. People bond through joys, labour, struggles, and conflicts. While conviviality's sociable sociality has sometimes been seen as fleeting and criticised for masking conflicts, intolerance, and racism (Back & Sinha, 2016; Nowicka, 2020), it has played a crucial role in binding the islanders together and constructing a collective Burgaz identity. The islanders who managed daily tensions also stood united in times of crisis.

As this article explores the connections between international and national policies on migration and minorities (as a long-term process of othering) and examines the narratives and representations of media productions as responses to political crises, the next section documents the changing historical and political contexts that altered the demographics of the island and affected the social life of Burgaz islanders.

Changing demographics in Burgaz: Post-Ottoman homogenising context and political crises leading to deportation and "voluntary emigration"

Burgaz, situated among the Princes' Islands, is a half-hour to an hour boat trip from Istanbul, making it "a faraway yet nearby" island (Hazar, 2005) within the cosmopolitan city. Its permanent population of around 2,000 rises to 7,000 in the spring, summer, and autumn and comprises more than twenty ethnic, religious, and linguistic groups from diverse socio-economic backgrounds. It serves as a compelling case study of post-Ottoman conviviality, retaining elements of its Byzantine and Ottoman heritage despite emigrations triggered by Turkey's nation-building efforts.

Historically, the Ottoman millet system categorised subjects by religion rather than ethnicity or nationality, providing autonomy in religious and legal practices. This system, characterised by its legal-religious structure, afforded each millet – whether Muslim, Rum (Greek-Orthodox), Armenian, or Jewish – autonomy in matters of religious practice and legal governance. However, the overarching aim was to centralise power under the sultan and maintain cohesion among diverse religious communities, ensuring their allegiance to the empire. The majority of Burgaz islanders were Rums (Greek-Orthodox minority in Turkey) until the nineteenth century when Ottoman elites, notably Germans, Austrians, French, and British, began using the Princes' Islands as resorts. The era of nation-building in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries emphasised homogeneous national identities (Güven, 2006), culminating in the compulsory population exchange between Greece and Turkey after the Turkish War of Independence (Hirschon, 2003; Oran, 2003). The Christian population in Asia Minor drastically decreased after World War I and the Asia Minor catastrophe (1919-1924) (see Morris & Ze'evi, 2024). However, the Rum population of Istanbul (including the Princes' Islands/Burgaz) and the Muslim community in Western Thrace were exempt from this exchange. Nevertheless, this process reinforced the sense of otherness among the remaining minorities (Güven, 2006; Keyder, 2003; Oran, 2003). Following the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire, the Treaty of Lausanne recognised non-Muslim millets (Greek-Orthodox, Armenian, and Jewish) as minorities in Turkey, but linguistic and ethnic differences and religious denominations among Muslims (such as Kurds and Alevis) remained unacknowledged, subjecting them to Turkish Sunni Muslim dominance (Çarkoğlu & Bilgili, 2011). The notions of "majority" and "minority" became institutionalised within the Turkish and Greek legal systems. The Treaty of Lausanne recognised the Rum, Armenian, and Jewish millets as non-Muslim minorities in

the Turkish Republic, while Muslims, as a whole, were categorised as the majority. Ethnically Turkish Sunni Muslims have historically dominated other Muslim groups of various ethnicities and languages (e.g., Kurdish, Albanian, Laz, and Zaza) and different Islamic denominations (e.g., Alevi, Sunni) (Çarkoğlu & Bilgili, 2011).

Following the nation-building of modern Turkey, successive Turkish governments implemented restrictive and oppressive policies targeting minorities, including excessive taxation (e.g., the Wealth Tax of 1942) on non-Muslims and the Turkification of language and education (Güven, 2006; Kaplan, 2006; Kaya, 2013). Worsening relations between Turkey and Greece over Cyprus, fueled by British propaganda, escalated tensions between Greek and Turkish Cypriots (Akar & Demir, 1994; Güven, 2006; Kuyucu, 2005). In this politically charged environment, reports of a bombing at Atatürk's house in Thessaloniki triggered the pogrom of September 6-7, 1955, targeting non-Muslims, particularly Rums (Orthodox Greeks in Turkey) in Istanbul, Izmir, and Ankara. While other Princes' Islands and parts of Istanbul suffered severe vandalism, Burgaz islanders, together with local police, successfully protected the islanders from external attackers. The pogrom deeply shocked and traumatised non-Muslims, reinforcing their perception of being "others" within their own country.

After Cyprus gained independence in 1960, the bi-communal governance structure transitioned to majority rule (with Greek Cypriots in the majority) in 1963, leading to inter-communal violence between Greek and Turkish Cypriots. As relations between Turkey, Greece, and Cyprus deteriorated, the Turkish government chose not to renew the Seyrisefain Pact, signed in 1930 between Turkey and Greece, which had allowed Greek citizens to work and reside in Turkey. In 1964, Rums with Greek citizenship were expelled from Turkey. The 1965 population census confirmed that, in addition to 11,000 Rums with Greek citizenship who left, approximately 30,000 Rums with Turkish citizenship also emigrated, as they had intermarried for centuries (Akgönül, 2007; Themopolou, 2019). After 1964, Rums became increasingly uneasy and lost trust in Muslims. Enosis activism from 1963 onward and attacks on Turkish Cypriots by Greek Cypriots (Akgönül, 2007, p. 301) heightened anxieties among the remaining Rums in Turkey. Unlike the 6-7 September 1955 riots, the Turkish army's invasion of Cyprus in 1974 did not provoke widespread violence against the Rums (Akgönül, 2007, p. 317). However, the cumulative effects of previous events had already deeply scarred the Rums, prompting many to leave voluntarily.

Turkey subsequently experienced two coup d'états, in 1960 and 1980, which had severe consequences for all Turkish citizens, particularly leftists. While some island inhabitants, primarily non-Muslims (e.g., Rums, Jews, Armenians), left Burgaz, others – including Alevis, Kurds from Anatolia, and Jewish, Suryani, and Sunni Muslim communities from Istanbul – settled on the island. Over the last decade, Turkey has faced significant political turmoil, including the Gezi Park protests in 2013, the staged/fake coup attempt in 2016, the COVID-19 pandemic, and financial crises. These developments have contributed to increasing emigration from Turkey (Baser & Öztürk, 2022; Elveren, 2018; Yanasmayan,

2018). Among those considering leaving are also members of Burgaz's highly educated upper class.

Having documented the historical and political contexts of the various crises that shaped the lives of Burgaz islanders, the next section examines the role of literary and filmic productions of Burgaz islanders from 2005 to 2021 in representing and rekindling conviviality, as well as in demonstrating solidarity and resilience during times of crisis.

Listening to Burgaz islanders' conviviality in times of crisis

The islanders' literary and filmic productions include novels, memoirs, interview-based books, and documentaries. I analyse all these genres to understand the islanders' reflections on their past and their perceptions of conviviality and diversity amid nationalism and violence. Building on Georgiou's (2017) argument that understanding solidarity requires examining both cohesion and division within conviviality, I explore the dual role of local media productions in representing and rekindling conviviality – both as a critique of homogenisation and as a means of healing and connection. To explore their perceptions and reflections on conviviality, political crises, and turmoil, I examined their memories of crises and the ways in which they demonstrated resistance, resilience, and solidarity, such as during the 1955 pogrom. I compared and contrasted representations of the 1955 pogrom and the homogenisation process as depicted in mainstream documentaries (Akar, 2007; Dündar, 2007) and academic research (Güven, 2006; Kuyucu, 2005; Mills, 2010) with those articulated in locally produced documentaries (Hazar, 2005, 2013; Uzunoğlu, 2013), novels (Aktel, 2005, 2008), and memoirs (Berberyan, 2010) of Burgaz islanders. Furthermore, I investigated how Burgaz islanders represent conviviality and diversity through metaphors and allegories, such as *ebru*/marbling, to uncover the underlying discourses, reasoning, and meanings embedded in these representations (see Hansen & Machin, 2013, pp. 115-151).The analysis of the empirical material is structured as follows to illustrate the role of these media productions: 1) representing conviviality through the *ebru* (marbling) allegory by challenging multiculturalism and cosmopolitanism literature – the *ebru* allegory fosters stronger cohesion and solidarity among the islanders and highlights the resilience of island living in response to various crises and violence; 2) critiquing homogenisation policies and nationalism by emphasising conviviality and solidarity in Burgaz; and 3) connecting separated islanders as a form of collective healing, coping with oppression and trauma from separation, with the hope of reunion.

I first examine Aktel's novel *Kestane Karası* (2005) and Berberyan's memoir (2010), which articulate memories of conviviality and depict a shared life. Next, I explore the representation of diversity within a homogenising context through Hazar's documentaries (2005 and 2013), Schild's interview-based book (2021), as well as Aktel's novel *Last September* (2008) and Uzunoğlu's documentary (2013). The latter two productions both critique homogenisation, which led to emigration from Burgaz, and narrate stories of

solidarity, resistance, and resilience in violent times. In the final subsection, I examine how these productions served as a call to those who left and how they narrate the story of their reunion.

Representing conviviality as ebru

Kestane Karası (2005) and Berberyan's memoir (2010) recount stories from the past, using nostalgic memories of conviviality to highlight the significance of sociable sociality as a unifying aspect of *ebru*-like living in Burgaz. *Kestane Karası* (Aktel, 2005) is a novel set in 1940s Burgaz, drawing its characters from real islanders of the time. The title refers to one of the most severe storms affecting the lives of fishermen in Burgaz. The novel portrays Burgaz as a Rum fishermen's island, where life is depicted not as separate ethno-religious groups coexisting side by side but as an intertwined, shared existence. The islanders fish, eat, drink, dance, fall in love, fight, and demonstrate solidarity in times of crisis, such as when a fire broke out in the church. Similarly, Berberyan's memoir (2010) presents the island as a place of classless sociability, where people from different socio-economic backgrounds – a fisherman, an architect, a lawyer, and a shoemaker – dine together in homes, and their children play together in the streets. She recalls attending Orthodox churches and funerals regardless of religious affiliation, celebrating significant religious holidays of Armenians, Muslims, Jews, and Rums together, as well as observing syncretic religious practices, such as a Muslim making the sign of the cross when frightened.

During my ethnographic research and interviews with islanders, I encountered similar syncretic practices and recollections of collective efforts to support fellow islanders. Islanders recalled instances of raising money for a sick resident's medical treatment. There were Greek-Orthodox and Catholic churches but no mosque on the island; as a result, non-Muslims, particularly the Jewish community, collected funds to build a mosque in 1953. Additionally, due to a sewage problem on the island, the islanders organised collective fundraising events at social clubs. With the contributions of engineers and professionals, a new sewage system was constructed. The novels, memoirs, and oral accounts challenge multiculturalist perspectives, such as those of Taylor (1992/1994), Kymlicka (1995), and Joppke and Lukes (1999), which define diversity primarily through distinct group identities and coexistence with difference. In contrast, the diversity in Burgaz is not solely about identity; ethnic and religious differences are recognised, valued, and appreciated, but they do not override the bonds of conviviality, intimacy, and solidarity among individuals or their collective sense of belonging to Burgaz.

For similar reasons, Aktel and Schild noted in their interviews that cosmopolitanism does not fully describe the diversity of Burgaz, as cosmopolitan people, in their view, do not internalise each other's cultures. Instead, they engage with people from different backgrounds without establishing deep-rooted connections or a collective identity. Aktel stated:

> Burgaz is not cosmopolitan, because in cosmopolitan societies, communities do not leave their impact or transmit their cultures to other groups and future generations. […] Cosmopolitan people and communities are distant, more superficial, and temporary, not bonded and are in less contact with each other.

The islanders use the allegory of ebru/marbling (Figure 1) to challenge both cosmopolitanism and the mosaic-like model of multiculturalism. The mosaic is perceived as imposing boundaries between groups and implying mere side-by-side coexistence (the pieces of stones can fall), whereas the ebru maintains distinct patterns while allowing for boundaries and colours to merge, making it more solid and resilient to crisis. In Burgaz, while different ethno-religious communities maintain their practices and identities, their boundaries are fluid and intertwined through shared experiences and an embodied sense of the island. They show solidarity to anyone in need, particularly when the island faces external threats, such as during the resistance to the 1955 pogrom.

While *Kestane Karası* (2005) and Berberyan's memoir (2010) narrate uplifting stories and positive memories, portraying conviviality through nostalgic recollections of those who stayed, those who left, and those who passed away, they subtly suggest that the island was once more diverse, vibrant, and joyful. The underlying message implies that the homogenisation process and the passage of time have gradually diminished the diversity and essence of Burgaz island life.

Diversity in a homogenising context: Emphasising solidarity and conviviality amidst violence

Hazar's documentaries *Nearby yet Faraway* (2005) and *The Women of the Island* (2013), and Schild's book *Live Ethnographic Museum* (2021), highlight the continuing diversity in Burgaz despite long-term homogenisation in Turkey. In both Hazar's and Schild's productions, the categorisation of diversity is not limited to the millet system, which recognised only non-Muslim minorities, but also includes unrecognised groups such as Alevis and Kurds, as well as various ethnic (Bulgarian, Macedonian), linguistic (Yiddish-speaking Ashkenazi Jews, Ladino-speaking Sephardic Jews), and religious denominations (Alevi, Sunni, Syriac, Catholic, Greek-Orthodox). Hazar's first documentary briefly touches on discriminatory minority policies (e.g., the Wealth Tax and the pogrom), recognising the homogenisation process while maintaining a hopeful tone about the future of diversity in Burgaz, conveyed through stories of friendships on the island. Hazar's last documentary series (2013) depict the stories of friendships and hardships of six Burgazlı women from different ethnic, religious, and national backgrounds. In my 2022 interview with Schild, as well as in his book (2021), he lists the various ethnic, linguistic, and religious diversities, as well as different regional origins of Burgaz inhabitants, arguing that these diversities have become *museumised* – they are remnants of past empires – while the Turkish nation continues to homogenise. Despite the book's proud representation of Burgaz's diversity, Schild (2021) also expresses anxiety about its disappearance, given the politically tense

and economically deteriorating situation in Turkey over the past decade, which has led to increasing high-skilled emigration (Yanasmayan, 2018; Baser & Öztürk, 2022).

Hazar's documentary (2005), Schild's book (2021), Aktel's *Last September* (2008), and Uzunoğlu's documentary (2013) all critique the homogenisation process. *Last September* (Aktel, 2008) and Uzunoğlu's documentary (2013) in particular have a somber and painful tone, highlighting the destructive impact of homogenisation, which forced many islanders to leave. While these productions are critical of othering and public displays of nationalism, they also convey the message that the *ebru*-like conviviality on the island functions as a resilience mechanism against homogenisation. Friendships and bonds formed among islanders offer hope for future reunions.

Last September (Aktel, 2008) begins and ends with the story of an unbreakable friendship between Gogo (a Rum Burgaz islander) and Kemal (a Sunni Turkish Burgaz islander), childhood friends who grew up on the island. When Kemal falls from a cliff and suffers multiple broken bones and significant blood loss, he undergoes surgery in Heybeliada, performed by Gogo's father, Niko, who is a doctor. Gogo donates blood to Kemal, as they share the same blood type, and remains by his side until he recovers. The novel then unfolds in a politically intensifying environment for the Rum community in Turkey. Newspapers report on the London Conference on Cyprus, fueling tensions between Greece and Turkey over the island. In the days leading up to the 1955 pogrom, rumors spread about demonstrations in Taksim, Istanbul, where university students and leftists would also participate. Islanders who traveled to Istanbul for work returned with anxiety and fear that the escalating political debates would lead to violence. The *İstanbul Ekspres* newspaper then reports that Atatürk's house in Thessaloniki has been bombed, igniting the pogrom. Despite the mainstream media's portrayal of escalating international tensions – polarising "the Greeks" against "the Turks" and "the Greek Cypriots" against "the Turkish Cypriots" – this divisive rhetoric and the mob violence that ensued did not turn Burgaz islanders against each other.

The pogrom of September 6-7, 1955, saw attacks and destruction in various parts of Istanbul and other Princes' Islands. While mainstream documentaries on the pogrom (Akar, 2007; Dündar, 2007) condemn it as a shameful event, *Last September* presents a more complex picture. It narrates the fear, shock, and horror of the attacks in Istanbul while also recounting how Burgaz islanders, in cooperation with the local police, prevented any attackers from setting foot on the island. One of my informants recalled, "On our island, not even a glass was broken".

In the national framework, the shared rhetoric and collective memory of the pogrom in these documentaries embed a sense of shame and fear, representing the event as a story of intolerance and violence. In contrast, Burgaz islanders' social memory of the pogrom is one of solidarity, articulated as a memory of conviviality. The riots were collectively resisted, and no destruction occurred on Burgaz. While the pogrom reinforced the ethnic and religious identities of non-Muslims in Turkey, the Burgaz islanders' collective

memory of resistance and solidarity strengthened their sense of belonging and Burgazian identity. This reflects Just's (2000) rhetoric of solidarity and Mitchell's (2002) nostalgic construction of island communities, in which islanders continue to narrate the resistance to the pogrom as embodying a "co-operative ethos and a strong sense of solidarity" (Mitchell, 2002, p. 125), fostering pride in being a Burgaz islander.

Last September marks the beginning of an end: after the pogrom, Rums were deeply shaken, their identities attacked, and their futures in Turkey cast into doubt. While Akgönül (2007) notes that the Rum population did not immediately decrease after the pogrom, they were left with profound fear. In the novel, post-pogrom conversations among Rum Burgaz islanders reveal their growing sense of despair for their children's futures in Turkey. Some had their passports confiscated, were prohibited from leaving the country, and were banned from selling their immovable properties. The only option left for them was to escape by boat, without telling other islanders. Gogo's family was among those who secretly fled. Gogo confides in Kemal: "Kemal, they do not want us in Turkey anymore, my dad told me […]. We are leaving, Kemal. We will migrate to Greece […]. Please do not tell anyone, OK?" (Aktel, 2008, pp. 201-202, author's translation). Kemal is devastated and struggles to believe what he has heard. Gogo ultimately escapes to Greece. The secret departure of Rum Burgaz islanders in *Last September* is also confirmed in Uzunoğlu's documentary, as well as in interviews I conducted with Burgaz islanders. Ajda, a resident of Burgaz, recounted:

> Rums were afraid to reveal their plans to leave, fearing they might be prevented from doing so. For instance, I spent the whole day in Kadıköy with one of my close Rum friends from Burgaz, and the next day, he left Turkey without even telling me goodbye!

Ajda was surprised that fear and anxiety had overshadowed the trust and intimacy of friendship, yet she also understood the deep-rooted apprehension her friend had experienced. Islanders noted how, one by one, the Rums disappeared, many without a chance to bid farewell.

Bringing together *Last September* (fiction), Uzunoğlu's documentary (non-fiction), and my interviews with islanders who stayed, I found that oral histories and literary/filmic representations confirmed each other. These productions (Aktel, 2008; Hazar, 2005; Uzunoğlu, 2013) critique the Turkish government's homogenisation policies while also acknowledging the broader political tensions between Turkey, Greece, Cyprus, and Britain, which ultimately harmed the Rum minority in Turkey. The Rums "paid the price" as scapegoats. Not only Rums but also other non-Muslims left due to discriminatory policies and an oppressive political climate. The novel effectively conveys the desperation felt by Rums, who saw no viable future in Turkey. In Uzunoğlu's documentary, Akis Tsalikis, a former Burgaz islander, recalls: "Upon completing my military service, I applied for a job as a public servant; they said that I could not be hired because I was not Turkish. Such things wore me out" (Uzunoğlu, 2013).

The institutionalised discrimination that restricted employment opportunities further exacerbated their alienation. The Wealth Tax (1942), the othering experienced during the 1955 pogrom, the 1964 expulsion of Rums with Greek citizenship, and the enduring anxiety before and after Turkey's 1974 invasion of Cyprus made many Rums lose hope for a future in Turkey. The next section will explore how Burgaz islanders – both those who left and those who stayed – coped with the trauma of separation and their collective efforts for reunion.

The connecting role of media: Reunion and collective healing

Nichols (2017, p. 185) highlights how trauma unfolds in documentaries, particularly those focusing on catastrophic events, exiles, and migration stories. The Burgaz islanders who remained were devastated by the departure of their friends. Those still living in Burgaz articulate memories of intolerance, violence, and oppression (not on Burgaz itself but beyond the island) to convey to those who left that they understand their pain. They recall memories of conviviality to reconnect with their friends. Writing novels and memoirs and producing documentaries became ways to reach and bring back those who left, even if only for a visit.

Nilufer Uzunoğlu, a Burgaz islander, documented the grand reunion of 2012 in Burgaz. She interviewed former islanders about why they left, how they left, what they did on their last day, how they felt, and what Burgaz means to them. While Uzunoğlu portrays the trauma of leaving through the eyes of those who left, she also illustrates the trauma felt by those who stayed. Her documentary opens with Engin Aktel's poem from *Last September* (Aktel, 2008), which calls for islanders who left to return, even if only for a day. In the poem, Aktel (2008) expresses the pain and emptiness left behind when friends departed due to homogenisation policies and political crises. He recognises their suffering and believes that those who left still yearn for Burgaz and grieve their separation from the island. The poem describes their childhood games – watermelon lanterns, paper rowboats, slingshots – the lighthouse, and boats in the harbor, evoking the sense that island life halted when they left. This rupture disrupted conviviality, the shared way of life on the island. Uzunoğlu's storytelling effectively conveys emotions, affect, and empathy between those who remained, like Aktel, and those who were forced to leave.

At their departure, some islanders took panoramic photographs, while others carried stones and flowers from Burgaz to keep a physical connection to their homeland. Those who left employed structural amnesia to suppress memories of intolerance, instead choosing to recall memories of conviviality in their selective recollections (see Halbwachs, 1992). In Uzunoğlu's documentary, Ethnopoulos states: "After leaving, I did not want to return at first because I did not want to mix the good memories with the bad ones". When reflecting on Burgaz, many described it as a place of refuge, protection, childhood adventure, and boundless freedom – an experience they could not find elsewhere.

The depth of friendships and strong bonds between separated islanders is powerfully depicted in Aktel's *Last September*. The novel's ending coincides with the Turkish invasion of Cyprus, where Gogo, now a Greek soldier, is sent to defend Greek Cypriots against Turkish forces, while Kemal is deployed as a Turkish soldier. They meet in the war zone, where Kemal risks his life to save his childhood friend. Gogo, his leg nearly amputated, tells Kemal: "That's the end, Kemal. I, who was expelled from my homeland, I, who longed for my homeland, I could not shoot as an enemy at the children of my homeland. I couldn't, Kemal. I couldn't" (Aktel, 2008, p. 248, author's translation). Kemal carries Gogo on his back, singing in Rumca, despite the warnings of other soldiers about falling bombs. In his attempt to bring Gogo to safety, Kemal is shot, and both Gogo and Kemal die holding hands, just as they did in their childhood in Burgaz. The novel leaves the reader with a powerful message: Government-imposed hostilities could not turn two childhood friends – one Rum and one Turk – from Burgaz into enemies, even in war.

However, forced separations were *not the end of the story*. Small reunions in Greece began bringing together former Burgaz islanders and those who had remained. For example, Aktel launched his novels in Greece, where attendance was so overwhelming that the venue ran out of space. His books were also translated into Greek. Uzunoğlu's documentary reveals the story behind the 2012 reunion, which was initially conceived during a smaller gathering in Greece. Nikos Tsalikis explained that during one of these reunions, the idea of holding a reunion in Burgaz emerged. Tsalikis recognised the potential of Facebook for organising the event. He created a Facebook group and was astonished to see how many Burgaz islanders from across the world joined – eventually reaching 1,600 members before the reunion. Through the group, people shared photos and memories, reconnected with long-lost friends, and formed new connections.

Social media played a crucial role in facilitating the reunion, allowing Burgaz islanders to reach those who had migrated to different countries, including Greece and the US. However, it is important to acknowledge that this reunion was not merely the result of digital connectivity. The accumulation of previous reunions, mediated and non-mediated communications, and various media productions – including novels, memoirs, and documentaries – made a fusion effect and helped foster the emotional momentum needed for such a large gathering. These media productions, disseminated through book launches, documentary screenings, and platforms like YouTube and Vimeo, reactivated a kind of reversible nostalgia. This rekindled a desire for reunion among the islanders, who were eager, even "hungry", to reconnect. The reunion served as a healing process for collective trauma both for those who had stayed, mourning the loss of friends, and for those who had left, mourning their lost homeland. Many islanders revealed in the documentary that they had not returned to Burgaz for decades because they could not bear the sorrow of leaving again. The 2012 reunion, as depicted in Uzunoğlu's documentary, allowed them to confront their trauma. At the end of the documentary, the former islanders arrive by public ferry, while some sail back from Greece. Near the harbor, a banner reads "Welcome

Home" in Turkish and Greek. The scene is filled with emotional reunions – laughter mixed with tears. Burgaz islanders wait at the dock, holding balloons, struggling to catch their breath as the moment overwhelms them. Many who left decades earlier finally return. Despite the rain, the reunion is filled with joy, as islanders eat, laugh, hug, and dance. All the restaurants place their tables outdoors, offering dinner to celebrate the occasion. The event was even reported in *Sabah*, a major Turkish national newspaper, where journalist Sonat Bahar (2012) remarked that she and the photographer had never witnessed people having such a great time – despite the pouring rain. The documentary ends on a hopeful note, illustrating how conviviality persisted despite decades of homogenisation and political adversity, reuniting separated islanders in an attempt to heal the collective trauma of displacement.

Conclusion

This article explored the role of media productions in the bittersweet, painful yet hopeful journey of Burgaz islanders as they sought to reunite their dispersed community. It examined their media representations in novels, books, memoirs, and documentaries, which depict conviviality as a shared way of living together in diversity while acknowledging the realities of living with difference. The article argued that in their representations of conviviality, the islanders employ the allegory of *ebru*/marbling to critique the mosaic model of multiculturalism. Unlike the mosaic metaphor, which implies distinct groups living side by side with clear boundaries, the marbling illustrates how the boundaries of different patterns blend into one another, forming a more resilient and interconnected whole. These media productions narrate the joys of living together, the conflicts they have managed, and their stories of solidarity and resistance against violence – such as the pogrom – and discriminatory policies affecting both recognised and unrecognised minorities in a homogenising context.

Through these productions, the islanders challenge the oppressive and discriminatory policies of the Turkish government while recalling memories of conviviality as a form of collective healing. Conviviality in Burgaz serves as a mechanism of resilience and solidarity in the face of state and public violence. During times of crisis, when individuals or the community as a whole are at risk, the islanders protect one another and collectively resist. Memories of resisting the pogrom and other acts of solidarity form the basis of a shared rhetoric and an island identity centered on conviviality, solidarity, and diversity.

Even those who left continue to see Burgaz as a place of refuge, conviviality, and freedom. In their selective remembrance, they associate Burgaz with happy and beautiful memories, setting aside experiences of intolerance elsewhere in Turkey. While no medium can truly bring back those who left to live permanently in Burgaz, locally produced media can create a space where traumas can be acknowledged and, to some extent, healed. In a post-Ottoman homogenising context where political crises led to forced and involuntary

migrations, even a short-lived reunion, in the form of rekindled conviviality, offer a hopeful and valuable story – one of dispersed islanders who used media to find their way back to each other.

Declaration of generative AI and AI-assisted technologies in the writing process

During the preparation of this work, the author used ChatGPT-4-turbo, March 2024 version (no extension number is provided), a generative artificial intelligence large language model (LLM) developed by OpenAI, in order to improve the readibility of the article following the guidelines of *MedieKultur* for the final manuscript to be proofread, to check and fix grammar mistakes and typos, as the author is a non-native English speaker. After using this tool, the author reviewed and edited the content to ensure accuracy.

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