

Forced Population Removals As a Result of the Conflicts in the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey (Fuat Dündar)

Population removals, transfers and expulsions, which were heavily practiced by the Ottoman Empire, have also been legitimate ways of settling ethnic conflict in modern Turkey especially within the past twenty years. The evacuation of villages geared towards “drying the swamp” during and after the PKK (Kurdistan Workers Party) attacks is not a problem of only modern Turkey, it is currently a problem inflicting many regional conflicts around the world. This study analyzes the universal problem of “displaced people” as a result of ethnic conflicts in the context of Ottoman and modern Turkish history. In doing so, it deploys a comparative analysis of historical population removals in the Empire according to their motivations (economic, ethnic, religious, and military) between the 16th and 20th centuries. The study documents that the transfer and resettlement policies exercised by the Empire during the 16th and 17th century rebellions (of the Anatolian Turkomans) as a military necessity have evolved into a combination of military and ethnic measures in the context of the 19th century nationalisms, and finally in the early 20th century they have become normative means of settling ethnic conflicts. For instance, the forced population removals of the Kurds preceded the armed conflict in Dersim rebellions (1937) and had been legitimized by the Turkish State with the “1934 Settlement Law” geared towards the ethnic homogenization of the Turkish territory.