

**State of Emergency and Depopulation Policy in Southeastern Turkey:
Forced Displacement and Resettlement of Ethnic Kurds in the Context of Civil War
(1990-2002)**

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Abstract: This thesis investigates the Turkish state's extensive displacement policy from 1990 to 2002 during the Kurdish-Turkish conflict. Under President Turgut Özal, the government established the OHAL (Olağanüstü Hâl Bölge Valiliği), a special administrative region designed to counter insurgency through extraordinary measures. This period marked a significant transformation in Turkey's political and cultural landscape, characterized by the mass evacuation and resettlement of rural Kurdish populations into urban areas. Using historical archives, official state documents and decrees, the thesis will make the case that (1) Turkey's depopulation policy in the 1990s was primarily motivated by ethno-nationalist aims; and (2) the OHAL-state of emergency enabled the Turkish state to more effectively pursue these goals in the Southeast by allowing the state to do things it usually would not be able to do under regular, 'non-emergency' circumstances – such as deploying special state-funded militias or granting judicial immunity for regional governors.

While some scholars have focused on the spatial aims of Turkey's policy—depriving insurgents of critical environmental resources—this thesis contends that an overarching ethno-nationalist ideology also played a crucial role. This perspective is supported by theories from Mann (2005), Lichtenheld (2019), and Straus (2015), which suggest that strategic displacement often occurs in ethnic conflicts where the state adopts an exclusionary elite ideology. The association of the Turkish state with a dominant ethnicized Turkish identity and the historical marginalization of Kurds as an ethnic out-group bolster this argument.

Despite significant contributions to understanding forced displacement, there is a gap in the literature concerning the integration of both ethno-nationalist and spatial factors within Turkey's OHAL policies. This thesis addresses this gap by demonstrating how the OHAL state of emergency facilitated the Turkish state's ethno-nationalist goals by enabling actions otherwise restricted under normal circumstances, such as deploying state-funded militias and granting judicial immunity to regional governors.

Ultimately, the thesis provides a comprehensive analysis of Turkey's depopulation policy, its ideological motivations, and its impact on the Kurdish population, offering new insights into the dynamics of forced displacement in civil-conflict contexts.

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1. Introduction

The thesis investigates an extensive displacement policy pursued by the Turkish state between 1990 and 2002. During these years, the Turkish state enacted an extensive re-settlement and depopulation policy in the context of an ongoing civil war commonly referred to as the ‘Kurdish-Turkish conflict’. This refers to continued tensions between Turkish security forces and members of the Kurdish Separatist movement formally beginning in 1978 and continuing through to present times. In 1990, the Turkish government, then led by Turkish President Turgut Özal implemented OHAL (*Olağanüstü Hâl Bölge Valiliği*) as part of a larger counter-terrorism effort to resolve this conflict – a ‘super-region’ which enabled specified regions to be governed under special government decree, different from those applied to the rest of the country. This period marked significant changes in Turkey's political and cultural landscape, with large-scale evacuations and the relocation of rural Kurdish communities to nearby urban centres. To paint a picture, in 1970 roughly 78% of the ethnic Kurdish population resided in one of 20,000 Kurdish-populated villages but by 1985, this had dropped to a mere 58% (O’Shea 2004, 160). The thesis aims to explore the driving forces behind this population shift, arguing that it was primarily propelled by ‘ethno-nationalist’ objectives. While some argue that Turkey's policy was driven primarily by ‘spatial aims’ to deprive the insurgents of vital environmental resources, there is reason to believe that the policy was influenced by an overarching ethno-nationalist ideology. This perspective holds that strategic displacement is often invoked in ethnic wars where the state harbours an exclusionary elite ideology, as suggested by Mann (2005), Lichtenheld (2019), and Straus (2015). The Turkish state's association with a dominant ‘ethnicized’ Turkish identity and the historical perception of Kurds as an ethnic out-group supports this argument. Using historical archives, official state documents and decrees, the thesis will make the case that (1) Turkey’s depopulation policy in the 1990s was primarily motivated by ethno-nationalist aims; and (2) the OHAL-state of emergency enabled the Turkish state to more effectively pursue these goals in the Southeast by allowing the state to do things it usually would not be able to do under regular, ‘non-emergency’ circumstances – such as deploying special state-funded militias or granting judicial immunity for regional governors.

The first chapter of the thesis situates this research question in wider context of the existing literature on displacement in civil war contexts. It gives background to prevailing population trends in the South-east of Turkey during the 1990s, focusing on the mass resettlement and forced displacement of ethnic Kurds within this period. By relying on national census data and data obtained from Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), this section contextualises the rapid population shift across 13 south-eastern provinces of Turkey and the extent to which this may be driven by Turkish depopulation policies at the time. The second chapter examines the goals and aims of Turkey's depopulation policy by relying on a collection of state archives from the Directorate of State Archives (Devlet Arşivleri Başkanlığı). It analyses a 38-page private letter exchange between Turkish President Turgut Özal and then-Prime Minister Suleyman Demirel communicating the urgency felt by the Turkish state in regard to the 'Kurdish question'. The third chapter then proceeds to discuss the implementation of Turkey's depopulation policy in practice and how it fit into its wider military and social aims. In particular, it will assess the extent to which Turkey's depopulation policy during 1990-2002 was shaped by strategic spatial goals (Hypothesis 1A) and if so, in what ways the OHAL-state of emergency may have enabled the Turkish state to better pursue these goals (Hypothesis 2A).

Overall, the thesis provides a comprehensive examination of the Turkish state's depopulation policy, its strategic motivations, and its impact on the Kurdish population, addressing a critical gap in the existing scholarly literature and contributing to the broader understanding of forced displacement in civil-conflict contexts. By exploring both spatial and ethno-nationalist explanations, the thesis deliberates over the primary motivations behind Turkey's depopulation policy during the Kurdish-Turkish conflict.

2. Literature review

2.1 Definitions

Forced displacement refers to any involuntary or coerced migration 'as a result of persecution, conflict, generalized violence or human rights violations' (UNCHR 2014, 2). The prevailing literature on displacement in the context of civil war and conflict differentiates between various forms of displacement. However, for the purpose of this thesis only two of these distinctions are principally

relevant. First (1) displacement can occur either across national borders from one territory to another; or within a country's borders, resulting in internally displaced persons (IDPs). The International Criminal Court, for example, defines displacement as either the 'forced removal of people from one country' or 'from one area to another within the same state' (ICC 1998, 3-4). Secondly (2) conflict analysts often distinguish between strategic and non-strategic displacement. Non-strategic displacement refers to civilians fleeing spontaneously due to 'generalized violence triggered by the conflict,' whereas strategic displacement involves civilians being deliberately uprooted as part of a 'planned strategy by belligerents' (Lichtenheld 2019, 11). For instance, in Algeria, displacement largely results from ongoing conflict between the government and insurgent groups. In contrast, in countries like Myanmar and Turkey, governments have intentionally displaced populations to weaken insurgency movements (Cohen 1999, 25-28). Understanding both strategic and non-strategic dimensions of conflict-induced mass displacement is crucial, as they help discern between displacement that is a calculated manoeuvre *orchestrated* as part of a greater political strategy and displacement that occurs as a mere by-product of generalized violence.

Depopulation can hence be considered a form of 'strategic' forced displacement, defined as the removal and indiscriminate targeting of individuals in a given village or a town (Lichtenheld 2019, 15). An example of a depopulation strategy is Russia's approach during the Chechen Wars, where the Russian government sought to 'pacify by depopulation' through indiscriminate bombing of Grozny (Lichtenheld 2019, 15). Here it is important to distinguish between a form of displacement that is akin to (and quite often used interchangeably with) depopulation, namely, cleansing. Cleansing entails physically removing large numbers of the specific, targeted group permanently from the country. An oft-cited example of ethnic cleansing is the armed expulsion of Croats and Bosniaks by Serbian forces during conflict in the 1990s in former Yugoslavia, where Serbian paramilitaries forcibly expelled Croats and Bosniaks from their hometowns. Cleansing based on political membership or affiliation rather than ethnic grouping can also be seen, for instance, in the Colombian civil wars during the 1980s or in Spain during the 1930s (Lichtenheld 2019, 15). When cleansing is deemed too 'risky' or 'challenging,' a state might resort to a depopulation strategy, displacing a population from their original location to 'deprive them of the ability to organize politically or militarily' (Valentino 2013, 38-39). While both strategies aim to displace populations, they differ in subtle but distinct ways. Cleansing specifically targets individuals based on

political, ethnic, or social identity, whereas depopulation indiscriminately targets entire populations, regardless of their affiliations to certain groups (Lichtenheld 2019, 14-15). Additionally, ethnic cleansing usually aims to permanently remove a population, whereas depopulation is often temporary, with the displaced population being allowed or encouraged to return to their homes once the conflict has subsided (Lichtenheld 2019, 15).

Why might a state be motivated to pursue one or more of these strategies of war then or, in other words, what is the motivation behind uprooting civilians during a civil war? Conflicting theories on displacement give different reasons for why a state might use forced displacement as a strategy to uproot civilians during civil war (Mann 2005; Lichtenheld 2019; Straus 2015; Lichtenheld 2019; Azam and Hoeffler 2002; Zhukov 2015). One such explanation contends that strategic displacement is employed primarily in ethnic wars where the state harbours an exclusionary elite ideology (Mann 2005; Lichtenheld 2019; Straus 2015). Where a state is associated with a dominant ‘ethnicized’ identity, strategic displacement may become a tool to exclude minority out-groups that do not fit in with the existing dominant identity (Mann 2005, 5-30). An example of this are the Serbian campaigns to rid regions of Bosnian Muslims in former Yugoslavia in line with the ethno-nationalist ideologies of Serbian leader Slobodan Milosevic (Lichtenheld 2019, 61). According to another theory strategic displacement is more likely in wars where rebels are particularly reliant on resources provided by the local population and it is difficult to detangle ‘friend from foe’ (Lichtenheld 2019, 62; Azam and Hoeffler 2002, 461-485; Zhukov 2015, 1155-1185). In many civil war contexts, the line between who forms part of the non-combatant civilian population and who forms part of a combatant rebel group is blurred. These sort of identification problems can cause trouble for the state whilst acting as a useful tactic for rebel or insurgency groups whose formation may partly depend on this ‘blurring’ of lines (Lichtenheld 2019, 61-62). As a way of resolving this the state may respond by emptying entire civilian regions as a way of depriving insurgency and rebel groups of a logistical or spatial resource. This is known as resource deprivation and is commonly utilised as a strategy in counterinsurgency wars (Lichtenheld 2019, 61). For example, in Myanmar the government has used a tactic of mass internal displacement of civilians to repress insurgencies through military forces. Chairman Mao Tse-Tung summarises this method in his famous statement on “draining the sea to kill the fish” where the sea forms the civilian population and the fish, the rebel forces (Mao 2000).

2.2 The Case of Turkey's OHAL region

In the case of Turkey, depopulation became a key instrument in the state's approach to the Kurdish question, emerging as a central part of their campaign to eradicate the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK). The emergence of an armed Kurdish political movement meant that the Turkish government had mounting interest in gaining political and militaristic control of the region (Hassanpour 1992, 297-305). This urgency intensified when the PKK initiated a large-scale Kurdish insurgency, known as the Serhildan, in the mid-1980s. Soon after this the OHAL-region (Olağanüstü Hâl Bölge Valiliği) was announced as part of the governments counter-terrorism strategy in the Southeast, leading to the creation of a so-called emergency 'super-region' in Turkey.

OHAL effectively enabled the chosen provinces to be governed under special government decree, different from those applied to the rest of the country. Established in 1987, the initial OHAL region encompassed Kurdish-populated areas in the southeastern part of the country, including major Kurdish towns and villages such as Bingöl, Diyarbakır, Elazığ, Hakkari, Mardin, Siirt, Tunceli, Van, Adıyaman, Bitlis, and Muş. By 1990, Batman and Şırnak were added to the OHAL region, bringing the total number of provinces under the State of Emergency legislation to thirteen (Yeni Safak 2002). During this period, the state of emergency was extended 46 times, each time for a period of four months (Yeni Safak 2002). The OHAL region remained in effect until November 30, 2002, when it was gradually reduced and eventually terminated under the Ecevit government.

The establishment of OHAL granted regional governors' extensive authority in the specified provinces. These powers included the ability to evacuate villages without prior notice, regulate union activities, and ban or confiscate publications without judicial review (Jongerden 2007, 141-145). The OHAL region was overseen by six 'super' governors with special superior powers surpassing those of the existing provincial governors. These 'super' governors were further granted immunity from any legal persecution in connection to acts committed under the new laws (Jongerden 2007, 141-145) effectively enabling the southeast to be 'subjected to a different legal and administrative rule from the rest of the country' (Yavuz 2001, 13). Among the sweeping powers granted to OHAL governors were the authority to impose

curfews, restrict movement, and conduct warrantless searches, further consolidating state control over the Kurdish population and suppressing potential dissent and opposition.

Over the course of 12 years, the Turkish state under the leadership of Turgut Ozal, led a strategic military campaign characterised by the mass evacuation of Kurdish villages, the slaughter of livestock, increased censorship of the press and union work, accompanied often-times by extreme violence and torture.

Whether this depopulation policy was driven primarily by ethno-nationalist aims or spatial aims has been subject to scholarly debate.

2.3 Spatial or Ethno-Nationalist

Some have argued that the primary aim behind this depopulation was to deprive the PKK of essential environmental resources by focusing strategically on the southeast which acted as ‘recruitment grounds’ for Kurdish militia (Jongerden 2007). In essence, this perspective contends that Turkey's depopulation policy was motivated by a militaristic and political desire to undermine the PKK by depriving it of its operational base through a regionally-targeted resettlement programme. Although the PKK was started by students in Ankara within an intellectual, urban landscape; it would eventually turn into a tumultuous and protracted peoples war localised in Turkey’s rural countryside. Following the ‘Dikmen-meeting’ – named after the neighbourhood in Ankara where the meeting took place – PKK members decided that it would be best to disentangle themselves from Ankara and establish themselves a base in (Turkish) Kurdistan i.e. the southeastern regions of Turkey (Jongerden and Akkaya 2012). This is quite typical of urban reorganisation in insurgency movements where the insurgency group will relocate to a different rural environment in an effort to re-establish themselves away from the enemy state:

“In order to avoid isolation and immediate dismantlement by the state, it was obliged to urgently establish a relationship with the residents of the rural communities. After relocating from Ankara in the 1970s, the PKK’s presence was most notable in urban or semi-urban environments in cities like Antep and towns like Kızıltepe and Mardin. However, that is not to argue that it was exclusively an urban organisation: it made strenuous efforts to mobilise in rural areas, most notably in campaigns against tribes in Urfa and Hilwan, but its strength certainly did not lie in Kurdistan’s isolated mountainous villages. This changed utterly in the lead-up to 1984, and the

guerrilla forces henceforth became deeply rooted in the countryside with a lesser presence in urban areas.” (O’connor 2021, 107-45)

According to the Official Statistics Portal of Turkey (TUIK), the southeastern regions of Turkey have the lowest GDP per capita and the highest unemployment rates in the country, both overall and particularly among the youth (TUIK 2018). Such socioeconomic factors such as having little or no employment often meant that youth were more likely to become recruitment targets for the PKK. At the same time, high fertility rates and population growth rates – which are higher in the southeast than the national average – often meant that children were habitually being recruited into the PKK (Övet et al 2022, 750-70). Baran, an ex-PKK member emphasises the significance of child soldiers in the PKK as follows:

“A lot of militants inside the PKK are children. I am talking about at least 20,000 children since the 1980s. you should also understand the families: they have eight, maybe nine children and an armed militant comes and wants your child, who cares? I mean, in this context, it would als (o not matter if it was the PKK or another organization.” (Övet et al 2002, 762)

By the late 1980s, the PKK had cemented itself in the southeast, having a strong operational hold in those regions as well as some neighbouring regions in Iraq and Iran, so much so that these areas were considered ‘one step away from the establishment of so-called liberated zones’ (Jongerden 2007, 62). The strategy of depopulation of in rural areas in the southeast was militaristically aimed at depriving the insurgents of a crucial resource: the ability to recruit new members from these regions. As a result, the primary objective of the depopulation policy, and subsequent displacement that followed, can be taken as an ‘idea to deprive the guerillas from their social environment’ by obstructing PPK operations through resettling its support base from the core (Jongerden 2007, 50). As already established, the blurring of the civilian population and insurgency group often acts as an advantage for insurgency groups in civil war conflicts as this complicates the state’s ability detangle ‘friend from foe’ (Lichtenheld 2019, 62; Azam and Hoeffler 2002, 461-485; Zhukov 2015, 1155-1185). Similarly, the PKK's relocation to rural areas enabled them to further ‘muddy the waters’ for the Turkish state, making it increasingly unclear who belonged to the politically unaffiliated civilian population and who were PKK members.

Others contend that Turkey's resettlement of ethnic Kurds in the southeast centred principally on an ongoing historical struggle for Kurdish identity recognition, rather than any inability to distinguish 'friend from foe' (Mohamed and Romano 2023, 1-3). The Kurdish-Turkish conflict has its roots in the aftermath of the Ottoman Empire's collapse and the subsequent creation of the modern Turkish state, where minorities were relentlessly denied formal linguistic, cultural, and political recognition. Under the leadership of founding father Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the newly proclaimed Republic of Turkey emerged with a new brand of Turkish nationalism, bringing an end to the Ottoman Sultanate in 1923. Atatürk introduced a new set of political, economic and cultural reforms which included a policy of 'Turkification' (*Türkleştirme*) denoting laws targeted at creating a homogenous and unitary Turkish nation. For example, non-Turkish last names were changed to Turkish names and Kurdish dress and folklore was banned (Hannum 1996, 186). Under the new Surname law, each citizen was required to adopt a family name with specific restrictions attached to the type of surname you could adopt e.g. no tribal names, no names relating to foreign ethnicities or nations (Aslan 2009). At the same time, many different ethnic groups were prescribed to conform to a new Turkish linguistic identity, and were instructed to only speak Turkish in public:

“Ethnic diversity was perceived as a danger to the integrity of the state, and the Kurds, as the largest non-Turkish ethnic group, obviously constituted the most serious threat. They were decreed to be Turks, and their language and culture were to be Turkish. All external symbols of their ethnic identity were suppressed....There was no official discrimination against those Kurds who agreed to be assimilated: they could reach the highest positions in the state apparatus. Those who refused, however, often met with severe repression” (HRW 2023)

After the passing of Law No. 2932, “The Law Concerning Publications and Broadcasts in Languages Other Than Turkish,” it was formally declared that “The mother tongue of all Turkish citizens is Turkish” (HRW 2023). All use of the Kurdish language was considered an act of treason and punishable by Turkish law and remained so until the year 1991. Whilst the process of Turkification did not exclusively impact Kurds, as the second largest ethnic group in Turkey with the second most widely spoken language after Turkish, the impact of such policies on Kurds in Turkey was profound. At present,

there is no more formal language ban on the Kurdish language, however, the use of Kurdish in educational settings, the teaching of the Kurdish language and Kurdish broadcast is still prohibited.

Kurds, along with several other minority groups, have since had a long and tumultuous history of discrimination perpetrated against them by the Turkish state. Mark Levene highlights that “the persistence of genocide or near-genocidal incidents from the 1890s through the 1990s, committed by Ottoman and successor Turkish and Iraqi states against Armenian, Kurdish, Assyrian, and Pontic Greek communities in Eastern Anatolia, is striking” (Levene 1998, 1). Historically within Turkey, they have faced periodical persecution and active state denial of their ethnic, linguistic and cultural identity. For example, there has been a ban on spoken Kurdish language in public places, government offices and schools since the establishment of the Republic of Turkey in 1923 (Hassanpour 1992, 297-305).

Following a military coup in 1980, Kurdish-populated regions in Turkey were targeted with new assimilation programmes which saw Kurdish languages and cultural symbols entirely prohibited from both public and private life (Hassanpour 1992, 297-305). The emergence of Kurdish nationalism in its modern form can therefore be generalised as resulting from two things (1) distinctiveness of Kurdish language and identity; and (2) continued state-oppression in the form of *denial* i.e denial of key linguistic and cultural identity.

In the article ‘Why Minorities Rebel: A Global Analysis of Communal Mobilization and Conflict Since 1945’ Ted Robert Gurr makes the point that this kind of continuous, historical loss of autonomy leads to defence of their collective rights by the minority group which is suffering this loss as well as resistance against the host state (Gurr 1993). As such, a large part of the Kurdish resistance movement is shaped by its demands for cultural, political and social recognition. Kurdish uprisings throughout the twentieth century, particularly those in 1925, 1927-1930, 1937, and from 1978 onwards, consistently emphasized the demand for an acknowledgement of their Kurdish political and cultural identity. Consequently, the Turkish government's decision to depopulate and resettle ethnic Kurds can be seen as an attempt to subdue Kurdish identity and quell resistance by disrupting the demographic and cultural continuity of Kurdish communities (Mohamed and Romano 2023, 3-8). According to Mohamed and Romano, effective conflict resolution, hinges therefore on official recognition and acceptance of Kurdish identity.

2.4 Areas of Interest

Despite significant contributions to the understanding of forced displacement and depopulation policies in conflict zones, the literature on the Kurdish-Turkish conflict between 1990 and 2002 reveals several critical gaps. Firstly, while the existing scholarship extensively discusses the strategic and spatial motives behind forced displacement, there is a lack of comprehensive analysis integrating both ethno-nationalist and spatial considerations within the specific context of Turkey's OHAL policies. Secondly, much of the current research on the Kurdish civil war conflict in Turkey fails to adequately connect the role of emergency powers and 'state of emergency' legislation to the implementation of these policies. The OHAL-region, designated as an emergency super-region, enabled the state to exercise powers beyond those permitted under normal circumstances—such as deploying special state-funded militias and granting judicial immunity for regional governors. This aspect of state power and its implications for forced displacement and depopulation policies have not been sufficiently explored.

This thesis aims to address these gaps by providing a nuanced analysis that intertwines the ethno-nationalist and spatial motivations behind Turkey's depopulation policy, offering a more holistic understanding of the state's strategic objectives. Utilizing a diverse array of primary sources, including historical archives, official state documents, and personal testimonies, the research will shed light on the complex interplay between state policies and ethnic identity. By doing so, it will offer an in-depth examination of how the OHAL-state of emergency facilitated these policies and the specific mechanisms through which forced displacement was enacted and sustained.

3. Method: Data Collection and Analysis

The project I am undertaking seeks to answer a critical question by utilizing an archival, qualitative approach: Why and how did the Turkish state pursue an extensive depopulation policy in the context of the State of Emergency (SoE) between 1990 and 2002? The thesis dives deep into the motivations, strategies, and implications of the Turkish state's actions during this tumultuous period, with a particular focus on the forced displacement and resettlement policies aimed at ethnic Kurdish populations in the southeastern regions of Turkey. The depopulation policies, which led to widespread displacement, are a

complex phenomenon rooted in the broader socio-political and military objectives of the Turkish state during a time of intense internal conflict.

The thesis deliberately focuses on displacement resulting from the actions of the Turkish state, with several key reasons guiding this choice. First, the thesis explores displacement as a strategy employed by state actors during civil wars, an aspect often overlooked in existing literature, which tends to focus more on non-state actors (i.e. rebel groups, state-independent militias). This study specifically examines the role of state actors (i.e. military, police, paramilitary forces) because the majority of the displacement of ethnic Kurds in Turkey's southeastern region during the 1990s was perpetrated by the Turkish army and state-funded militia. While the PKK and other smaller non-state armed groups also contributed to displacement, their limited resources made large-scale strategic displacement less feasible.

Furthermore, research indicates that state actors are more likely than insurgents to use strategic displacement in civil wars. Adam Lichtenheld who conducted a cross-national study of 160 civil wars between 1945 and 2008 found that of those perpetrators that employed strategic displacement as a tactic, 60% were state actors whilst only 15% were non-state actors (Lichtenheld 2019, 19). Lichtenheld hypothesises that this is likely because 'states tend to possess the firepower, organizational capabilities, and logistical resources needed to facilitate mass population movements' whilst non-state actors tend to possess fewer resources and thus far less likely to engage in these practices (Lichtenheld 2019, 19). By examining Turkey's depopulation policy in detail, my research not only contributes to a deeper understanding of the Turkish-Kurdish conflict but also adds to the broader discourse on how strategic displacement is mechanised by state actors in context of civil war.

To collect data, I relied on an extensive array of materials, including historical and archival documents, official state publications, and existing population and census data. These sources provided a solid foundation for a comprehensive analysis of the depopulation policy and its implementation. The thesis examines Kurdish population trends in the southeastern regions of Turkey during the 1990s, emphasizing the mass resettlement and forced displacement of ethnic Kurds. By using national census data and figures from the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), the project provides a contextual backdrop to understand the rapid population shifts across 13 southeastern provinces of Turkey. This demographic

analysis serves as a starting point for exploring the larger narrative of state policy, revealing patterns that suggest a deliberate attempt by the Turkish government to alter the ethnic composition of these regions.

The subsequent sections of the thesis delve into the practical application of Turkey's depopulation policy and explore how these policies aligned with broader military and social objectives. By consulting historical archives, official state documents, and governmental declarations, I was able to situate Turkey's depopulation policy within the broader context of two key areas: (1) the overarching aims and goals of Turkey's depopulation policy, and (2) the strategies and tactics employed in the implementation of this policy. This examination provides crucial insights into how the depopulation policy was not just a standalone initiative but part of a larger, multifaceted approach to counterinsurgency and state control. In particular, my research assesses the degree to which Turkey's depopulation policy from 1990 to 2002 was influenced by strategic spatial goals, which is the basis for Hypothesis 1A:

Hypothesis 1A: Turkish state's depopulation policy in the Southeast during the years 1990-2002 was primarily motivated and shaped by strategic spatial concerns.

Hypothesis 1B: Turkish state's depopulation policy in the Southeast during the years 1990-2002 was primarily motivated and shaped by ethno-nationalist concerns.

Furthermore, I explore how the SoE framework may have enabled the Turkish state to more effectively pursue these goals, which is the focus of Hypothesis 2A:

Hypothesis 2A: The OHAL state of emergency during the years 1990-2002 enabled the Turkish state to more effectively pursue wider militaristic and political goals in the Southeast.

The intersection of these hypotheses offers a nuanced view of the state's motivations, suggesting that the policy was not merely reactive but was driven by long-term strategic considerations.

It is important to note that, given the ongoing contentious nature of the Kurdish-Turkish conflict in Turkey today, access to certain resources was limited. To address these limitations, I employed a diversified approach to data collection, relying on a broad array of sources, including publicly available

archival materials, international reports, and secondary analyses, to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter. This strategy not only compensated for the limited availability of specific documents but also allowed for a more triangulated and balanced examination of Turkey's depopulation policy.

The methodological approach employed in this project is rooted in a deductive process of thematic analysis, which I used to scrutinize a range of textual sources including letters, reports, and publications. Thematic analysis, as a method, provides a systematic approach to interpreting qualitative data, enabling researchers to categorize and analyze information in a way that increases accuracy in understanding complex social phenomena. As Boyatzis (1998) notes, thematic analysis is particularly useful for scholars, observers, or practitioners who need to synthesize various types of information in a coherent and systematic manner. This method is especially well-suited for my project, which requires the analysis of diverse textual sources to construct a nuanced understanding of Turkey's depopulation policy during the OHAL period. The use of thematic analysis also allows for flexibility in data interpretation, accommodating the complexities inherent in analysing state policies that are both strategic and ideologically driven.

In applying thematic analysis, I began by categorizing themes based on the topics discussed in the literature review. The codebook was developed accordingly, with specific codes assigned to different aspects of the depopulation policy. For instance, one of the key themes identified in the literature is the notion that Turkey's depopulation policy in the 1990s was motivated by 'spatial' objectives. This refers to the state's aim to deprive insurgent groups, particularly the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), of vital physical and spatial resources. On the other hand, the ethno-nationalist explanation posits that strategic displacement is often employed in ethnic conflicts where the state is driven by an exclusionary elite ideology (Mann 2005; Lichtenheld 2019; Straus 2015). In the context of the Turkish-Kurdish conflict, the Turkish state has historically promoted a dominant 'ethnicized' Turkish identity, viewing the Kurdish population as an ethnic out-group that does not fit within this framework. This ideological dimension has played a significant role in shaping the conflict and may have been a key motivating factor behind the strategic displacement policies implemented during the civil war. The intertwining of these spatial and

ethno-nationalist motivations provides a richer, more complex understanding of the state's actions during the given period.

Given these competing explanations, my project operationalizes themes based on these two potential motivations: spatial aims and ethno-nationalist aims. Each theme was assigned a specific code, such as 'active negative attitude towards ethnic out-group' for the ethno-nationalist explanation (Code 2b). Additionally, themes were further operationalized based on the distinction between SoE and non-SoE strategies, with corresponding codes such as 'use of special state-funded militias or resources' (Code 3b). This systematic approach allowed for a more rigorous analysis of the letters, decrees, and other textual materials within a well-defined conceptual framework. The methodological rigor employed in this process not only strengthens the validity of the findings but also ensures that the analysis is grounded in a clear and consistent interpretative framework.

Once the textual information was categorized according to the coding framework (as detailed in Appendix A), I employed Attride-Stirling's method of 'thematic networks' to identify overarching global themes from the coded text. This method involves a three-step process: first, identifying basic themes from the encoded text; second, refining these basic themes to focus on larger organizing themes or issues; and finally, deducing global themes that encapsulate the main arguments or issues presented in the text. This process not only helps in organizing the data but also facilitates the interpretation of qualitative information by moving from specific observations to broader, more abstract themes that capture the essence of the text under study (Attride-Stirling 2001, 387-394). To effectively manage and analyse large volumes of archival data, including decrees, state publications, official statements, and reports, NVivo software was employed. NVivo enabled the systematic coding and organization of these diverse sources, ensuring a more structured and comprehensive analysis of the textual materials relevant to Turkey's depopulation policy.

Thematic analysis, as applied in this project, is inherently interpretative. It is particularly useful in the early stages of research when the researcher is still formulating a research agenda and needs to explore a wide range of phenomenological information. As Boyatzis (1998) points out, this approach allows for an inductive beginning of inquiry, which can be crucial for developing a deeper understanding of complex

social phenomena. However, this interpretative nature also presents certain methodological challenges.

One of the primary limitations of thematic analysis is the potential for researcher bias. Because the process relies heavily on the researcher's own interpretation of the data, there is a risk of projecting personal assumptions or 'filling in gaps' in the data, which can lead to inaccurate or skewed conclusions.

To mitigate these potential biases, I employed a consistent system of coding that was grounded in a pre-existing conceptual framework. By adhering to this framework, I aimed to reduce the influence of subjective interpretations and ensure that the analysis remained as objective as possible. Moreover, the use of thematic networks provided a structured approach to data analysis, allowing for a more systematic interpretation of the information collected. This approach not only enhances the rigor of the analysis but also contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of the motivations behind Turkey's depopulation policy and the reasons for its implementation. The combination of these methods ensures that the findings are robust and can withstand critical scrutiny, thereby contributing valuable insights to the academic discourse on state strategies in conflict situations.

In conclusion, this project represents a significant effort to unravel the complexities of Turkey's depopulation policy during the 1990-2002 OHAL period. Through the use of archival research, qualitative analysis, and thematic networks, I have sought to provide a nuanced understanding of the factors that drove this policy, the strategies employed in its implementation, and its broader implications for the Turkish-Kurdish conflict. Ultimately, the findings of this project offer valuable insights into the dynamics of state power, identity politics, and territorial control in the context of modern conflicts. The implications of this research extend beyond the Turkish case, providing a framework for understanding similar state actions in other conflict zones where population control is a critical aspect of state strategy.

4. Goals and Aims of Turkey's Depopulation policy

This chapter examines the goals and aims of Turkey's depopulation policy by relying on a collection of state archives from the Directorate of State Archives (Devlet Arşivleri Başkanlığı).¹ In particular, it analyses a 38-page private letter exchange between Turkish President Turgut Özal and then-Prime Minister Suleyman Demirel communicating the urgency felt by the Turkish state in regard to the 'Kurdish question' and proceeding to lay out a semi-comprehensive plan of action for southeast. Using thematic analysis, the chapter attempts to understand the greater motivations and aims behind Turkey's depopulation policy during this period. I will also draw upon the National Security Council or Millî Güvenlik Kurulu (MGK) – which is the primary agency used by the Turkish president for matters concerning national security, military and foreign policy – will also be a helpful resource. This contains reports on military activities, speeches by regional and superior governors and documents. In a similar vein, the chapter will further consider press reports on military activity during the 1990s such as for example the Milliyet Gazete Arşivi, which is an archive that contains detailed news reports on the activities of OHAL-governors e.g. reports on OHAL Governor Hayri Kozakcıoğlu's conduct during his regional governance (Milliyet 1992). This chapter uncovers how Turkey's depopulation policy, under the guise of combating insurgency, was deeply intertwined with an ethnographic-nationalist agenda aimed at forcibly assimilating the Kurdish population, revealing the policy's dual purpose of spatial control and cultural homogenization.

4.1 The Letter

Özal's letter starts with a description of the Kurdish-Turkish conflict as one of the Turkish republic's 'most significant problem':

'...In the Southeast, we are faced with perhaps the most significant problem in the republic's history. The 'Kurdish Question' in south-eastern Turkey, what with its political, social and economic aspects, and with bloody acts of terrorism, poses an ever-growing danger. The

¹ The Turkish Foreign Ministry is currently developing a system to catalogue its archives, so there is no cache of declassified or unclassified documents. However, Turkey has a Law on Right to Information that went into effect in 2004 that gives researchers the right to request access to diplomatic records

beginnings of the problem date back to the final years of the Ottoman rule. In the 15 years that ensued after the declaration of the republic, the state had to put down a number of rebellions [by Kurdish secessionists]. Blood was shed when necessary, and a certain portion of the local population was forced to migrate to the west of the country.'

This passage sets the tone for the entire letter, highlighting the gravity with which Özal views the Kurdish issue. By referring to the conflict as "perhaps the most significant problem in the republic's history," Özal underscores the existential threat he believes it poses to the Turkish state. His reference to past Kurdish rebellions, such as the Sheikh Said Rebellion, indicates a historical continuity in the Kurdish struggle for identity and autonomy. The mention of forced migration reflects the state's long-standing approach to dealing with Kurdish dissent—through coercion and displacement.

The Sheikh Said Rebellion is particularly significant here, as it represents one of the first large-scale nationalist Kurdish rebellions against the Turkish Republic. The reasons for the armed rebellion (stated by a group of former Ottoman Kurdish officers involved in the revolt) were continuing raids of Kurdish villages, mistreatment of Kurdish soldiers in the army, the elimination of the word 'Kurdistan' from institutional documents, the ban of the Kurdish language in legal proceedings and educational settings and changes of Kurdish names in favour of Turkish ones (Mohamed and Romano 2023, 10). For many, this is considered to be the first large-scale nationalist rebellion by Kurds in demand for Kurdish identity recognition (Olson 1989, 43–45). Since then, there have been several other rebellions such as the 1927 Ararat Rebellion and the 1937 Dersim Rebellion in which over 30,000 Kurds were massacred by Turkish military forces (Gerlach 2016, 406).

Under Ottoman rule, various ethnic and religious communities, including Kurds, lived harmoniously due to the millet system, which allowed for self-regulation and cultural autonomy. The dissolution of the Ottoman Caliphate after WWI and the subsequent founding of Turkey disrupted this harmony. The emergence of the Turkish nation-state, with its emphasis on a singular national identity, led to the marginalization of Kurds and other ethnic groups, sparking Kurdish rebellions as they sought to preserve their cultural and linguistic rights and govern themselves (Mohamed and Romano 2023, 7-9). The right to self-determination, in this sense, is a relatively modern concept, closely bound to the emergence of

nation-states and the ethnonationalist forces that often accompany them (Cassese 1995). At the same time, it should be noted that “long before the age of nationalism there already was a sense of common identity among (Kurdish) tribes whose cultures were ‘objectively’ quite diverse” (Van Bruissen 1994, 17). Faced with this multifaceted and deep-rooted conflict, Özal's approach recognizes the need for an all-encompassing comprehensive strategy, emphasized in his letter:

‘The problem we face is way beyond the simple dimensions of terrorism. Therefore, it is imperative to consider short-, medium-, and long-term solutions and to adopt two separate approaches for dealing with the local population and the terrorists [...] It must be borne in mind that owing to military measures being taken to wipe out terrorist activity, the locals in the Southeast have been subjected to harsh treatment and feel, as a result, estranged. If there have been mistakes made in tackling terrorism, they should be frankly discussed, and realistic solutions must be sought.’

Here, Özal acknowledges the limitations of a purely military approach to the Kurdish issue. He recognizes that the harsh measures taken against the local Kurdish population have led to widespread alienation and that any effective strategy must address both the immediate threat of terrorism and the broader socio-political grievances of the Kurdish people. This dual approach—separating the "local population" from the "terrorists"—reflects Özal's awareness of the need for a more nuanced and multifaceted solution, rather than relying solely on repression. To address these issues, Özal suggests an immediate strategy focusing on the relocation of vulnerable Kurdish populations:

‘Starting with the most troubled zones, villages and hamlets in the mountains of the region should be gradually evacuated. With this group of PKK (outlawed Kurdistan Workers’ Party) supporters, in number no more than 150,000 to 200,000, being resettled in the Western parts of the country according to a careful plan, logistic support for the PKK will have been cut off and their standard of living will have improved.’

This proposal for the evacuation and resettlement of Kurdish populations is significant because it reveals the underlying intent of Turkey’s depopulation policy. Whilst framed as a counterinsurgency measure to

isolate the PKK, the strategy also serves a distinctly ethnographic-nationalist agenda by forcibly displacing Kurds from their ancestral lands and diluting their presence in the southeast. Official statistics indicate that 3,215 settlements, including 833 villages and 2,382 small rural settlements, were evacuated and destroyed across 14 provinces in the East and Southeast, such as Adiyaman, Ağrı, Batman, Bingöl, and Diyarbakır (Oyan et al 2001). In addition to these relocation efforts, Özal advocates for aggressive military and infrastructural measures to isolate and neutralize the PKK:

‘With the evacuation of mountain settlements, the terrorist organization (PKK) will have been isolated. Security forces should immediately move in and establish complete control in such areas. To prevent the locals’ return to the region, the building of a large number of dams in appropriate places is an alternative.’

This further highlights Özal’s focus on spatial control as a means of combating insurgency. By evacuating Kurdish villages and constructing dams, the state aimed to physically reshape the landscape to prevent any resurgence of Kurdish resistance. The construction of dams, in particular, reflects a strategy of using large infrastructure projects to exert control over the region, both militarily and economically. Lastly, the letter sets out the creation of a highly trained, professional special force dedicated to counter-terrorism and 24-hour patrol:

‘A 40,000 to 50,000-strong special force, comprised of full professional units, with at least one year of special training behind them, should be set up to fight against the PKK. They should be paid satisfactory salaries. Unit commanders in this force should be given leeway to take initiatives on any issue when conditions necessitate it. The special force must not be a force on the defensive. It must be a force that tracks terrorists down and attacks them. Naturally, they should maintain contact with other units deployed in the area and cooperate with them. Ordinary units of the standing army must only be used for routine military duties such as security checks and control.

‘On all highways in the region, 24-hour patrol duty by special teams is a must. Helicopters in day-time, and night-vision armoured personnel carriers at night, must be on patrol duty. A complete

overhaul of the security network in the region is urgent. Security personnel must be transformed from a defensive force to one that is offensive [...] The purchase of 20 Cobra and 20 to 30 Sikorsky helicopters for the security forces deployed in the area will help create a mobile force that can handle incidents that might occur simultaneously.’

This proposal marks a significant shift in Turkish military strategy. Özal’s call for a professional, mobile force dedicated to counter-insurgency reflects a move away from the traditional, defensive military posture towards a more proactive and aggressive approach. This change was driven by the recognition that the existing military strategies were inadequate for dealing with the asymmetric warfare tactics employed by the PKK.

Joost Jongerden argues that Özal’s letter has three core features. On the first level (1) Özal’s proposal for the Southeast was a distinctly ‘spatial’ one. Özal links effective combat against the PKK to the evacuation of villages in troubled areas and the resettlement of their populations. This strategy aimed to isolate the PKK and prevent the return of displaced individuals through large infrastructure projects like dams. On a second level (2) the letter emphasises knowledge and control of the population as being paramount to fighting insurgency. Özal underscored the importance of transforming the region and its population into subjects of study which appears to be done primarily through the Southeast Anatolia Project (GAP). The GAP focused on socio-technological transformation and conducted studies on various social trends to inform better governance and cultural politics. Thirdly (3) his approach marks a moment of military modernization. Özal proposed reorganizing the Turkish Armed Forces to effectively counter the PKK as the existing military strategies were based on an outdated doctrine and unsuitable for dealing with the guerrilla tactics at hand. He advocated for an asymmetric warfare approach, marking a significant shift in Turkish military doctrine:

“The cold war had come to an end, but even after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the military strategy of the Turkish army was continued to be based on the doctrine of static territorial defense by a standing army against a coherent mega-threat (an invading Soviet Army, centrally organized and clearly identifiable). The war with the PKK did not fit the doctrinal remnants of the cold war, however, and the army was rapidly losing control. [...] Özal proposed a reorganization of the

Army so as to be able to wage an asymmetric war—which constituted a revolution in the Turkish military and military philosophy of the time” (Jongerden 2007, 50)

Indeed, the majority of the measures mentioned in the letter appear to have been implemented in its aftermath. These included the establishment of highly trained, professional special units dedicated to combating the PKK i.e. the Village Guards, the evacuation of thousands of Kurdish villages, and the undertaking of projects to gain a deeper understanding of the region, exemplified by the GAP Project (Güneydoğu Anadolu Projesi) - which was a series of projects in the Southeast conducted to develop a better understanding of the region's composition and eliminate regional disparities in the area. These measures aligned with President Ozal's directive that "the people settled in faraway mountain villages and hamlets" who could act as potential rural support for the PKK "should be encouraged to move into bigger settlement areas."

4.2 The National Security Council, the Military and the Press

The National Security Council or *Milli Güvenlik Kurulu* (MGK) can be seen as the single most important policymaking body regarding the Kurdish issue in Turkey. It is led by the President of Turkey, who simultaneously serves as its Commander-in-Chief, to address national security, military, and foreign policy issues alongside senior national security officials. Whilst the powers of the MGK are limited to an advisory capacity, its institutional 'composition potentially makes it the most important body in the country' (Barkey and Fuller 1998, 143). Established in the aftermath of the 1960 military coup, it has been enshrined in Turkish constitutional law since 1961 and is described by scholar Sakallioğlu as "a double-headed political system," where the civilian council of ministers coexisted with the national security council at the executive level, and the military justice system operated independently alongside the civilian justice system (Sakallioğlu 1997, 157-158; Barkey and Fuller 1998, 143-144).

During the 1990s, the implementation and strategic responsibilities of the depopulation policy shifted away from the interdepartmental settlement commission and towards the National Security Council (MGK) making it a central actor in the forced displacement of Kurds in the Southeast. Amendments to the Settlement Act No. 2510 – a law adopted in 1934 which set out the foundations of immigration and

forced resettlement in Turkey – meant that in accordance with recommendations from the MGK, the Council of Ministers can decide on evacuations ‘for reasons of national security’ after which the Prime Minister’s office was to indicate a settlement alternative (Joost 2007, 117-116). Article 14 of the amendment continues with ‘if [the displaced] decline to live in the places directed by the Office the Prime Minister, their rights [to resettlement] will be annulled by the local settlement commission. Families in this situation may not make a second housing application’. According to Joost, this effectively ‘turns the law into legislation for forced resettlement’ as it grants the government extensive power to relocate populations against their will under the pretext of national security (Joost 2007, 116). This interpretation underscores the state's capacity to enforce displacement without the consent of those affected, stripping them of any legal recourse should they refuse the designated relocation sites.

When assessing the goals and aims of Turkey’s depopulation policy, it is important to note the intentions behind the government’s passing of the Settlement Act No. 2510 and amendments thereafter. The drafters of the bill proposal emphasized the ‘assimilative design of the new law by bringing up the need for measures to promote the use of Turkish by those who remained removed from ‘Turkish culture’ (TBMM Zabıt Ceridesi, 2-3). The then-Turkish Interior Minister Şükrü Kaya stated the primary aim of this legislation as a law that “will create a country speaking with one language, thinking in the same way and sharing the same sentiment” (TBMM Zabıt Ceridesi, 141). Erol Ülker highlights that the historical ethno-nationalist dimensions of the 1934 Settlement Act are, in this sense, undeniable:

“The use of such terms as race, descent and blood in the law proposal and the deputies’ speeches in the Grand National Assembly was clearly inspired by the prevailing Turkish nationalist discourse which became increasingly characterized by open ethno-cultural references in the political context of the 1930s [...] The phrasing of Law 2510 was under the influence of this context as well. Terms like ‘the Turkish race’ and ‘descent’ appeared prominently in the final draft of the law, echoing the prevailing nationalist ideology of the period. Yet ‘Turkish culture’ was the most critical concept of the Settlement Law. It was clearly associated with speaking Turkish as one’s native tongue.” (Ülker 2008).

Alongside the MGK and Council of Ministers, the role of the OHAL region 'super' governor was paramount. Over the course of the OHAL period, there was a total of six OHAL governors – starting with Hayri Kozakçıoğlu (1987-1991), Necati Cetinkaya (1991-1992), Ünal Erkan (1992-1995), Necati Bilican (1995-1997), Aydın Arslan (1997-1999) and ending with Gökhan Aydiner (1999-2002). With the establishment of Decree 285 the OHAL governors had the legal provision to evacuate and resettle entire settlements. Following the introduction of Decree No. 430 in December 1990, the OHAL governors' powers were further extended to allow them to have authority over the existing provincial governors in the area, to coordinate action between them and to exile people from the region (Jongerden 2007, 141).

It is important to note that this shift in responsibility to OHAL governors went hand in hand with an increase in Turkey's military spending. During this period, Turkey's military expenditure reached an all-time high, with the country ranking first in arms imports among NATO members and second in the Middle East between 1992-1996 (Günlük-Şenesen 2001, 27). Turkey's share of NATO arms imports surged from 20% in 1987 to 36% by 1996, reflecting the intensification of military operations and the growing emphasis on security within the region 1996 (Günlük-Şenesen 2001, 27-29). This increase in military expenditure underscores the critical role that OHAL governors played in managing the security and military conduct of the time, as they were entrusted with extensive powers to maintain control and implement state policies in an increasingly volatile region. A 2001 report from the Milliyet Archives disclosed that two spy planes, which had remained unused at the Diyarbakır Air Base for over a dozen years and cost approximately 3.5 trillion liras (or £81,652), were acquired at the behest of OHAL Governor Hayri Kozakçıoğlu as part of the 'fight against terrorism' (Milliyet Archive, 2001). In response to these allegations, Kozakçıoğlu denied any wrongdoing, asserting that the planes were provided "as an addition to the main units." He further claimed that documentation regarding the system's cost and the types of reports generated during the procurement process were accessible in the relevant files (Milliyet Archive, 2001). These developments highlight the intricate balance between military oversight and administrative authority during the OHAL period, where the extraordinary powers granted to OHAL governors were emblematic of the broader state strategy to exert control and address the complex security challenges in the region.

4.3 Findings

The goals and aims of Turkey's depopulation policy, as examined through archival material, letters between President Turgut Özal and Prime Minister Suleyman Demirel, and reports from the National Security Council (MGK), reveal a multi-layered approach combining spatial and ethnographic-nationalist dimensions. The policy was ostensibly designed to address the Kurdish question by displacing Kurdish populations and severing logistical support for the PKK. However, this spatial strategy cannot be disentangled from the ethnographic-nationalist agenda underpinning it.

Özal's letter highlights the urgency of a comprehensive solution, outlining a plan that includes evacuating troubled zones, resettling Kurdish populations in the west, and implementing aggressive military measures to isolate the PKK. This spatial approach aimed to transform the region through large infrastructure projects, military modernization, and socio-technological initiatives like the Southeast Anatolia Project (GAP). These measures were intended to reshape the region's demographic and socio-economic landscape, ultimately seeking to assimilate and control the Kurdish population.

The role of the National Security Council (MGK) in executing the depopulation policy further underscores the intertwining of spatial and ethnographic-nationalist goals. Amendments to the Settlement Act No. 2510, granting the government extensive powers to relocate populations under national security pretexts, reflect a continuation of Turkey's long-standing efforts to homogenize its population. The historical context of the Settlement Act and its ethno-nationalist motivations, aiming for a monolithic national identity, reveal the deeper intentions behind the policy.

In essence, while the depopulation policy's spatial aims are evident, they are inextricably linked to an ethnographic-nationalist agenda. The forced displacement of Kurds was not merely a tactical manoeuvre to combat insurgency but a strategic effort to assimilate and Turkify the Kurdish population. Understanding this duality is crucial for comprehending the full scope and impact of Turkey's depopulation policy during this period.

Next, I delve into the specific strategies and methods used to implement Turkey's depopulation policy on the ground. By exploring how these plans were put into action, we can assess whether the duality between spatial control and ethnographic-nationalist objectives was truly reflected in practice. This analysis will provide a comprehensive understanding of the policy's practical implications and the extent to which it succeeded in achieving its aims.

5. Strategy and Implementation of Turkey's Depopulation policy

This chapter examines the strategy, implementation, and actual outcomes of Turkey's depopulation policy, relying primarily on archival material and decree-documents. More specifically, I analyse special government decrees passed during the years 1990-2002, focusing on two OHAL decrees in particular.² First, those granting regional governors more power and secondly, those implementing the village-guard system. The decrees concerning regional governors essentially meant that provinces within the OHAL region were subjected to special government decrees which did not require constitutional supervision by the courts and could therefore be governed according to different legal and administrative rules than those applied to the rest of the country.

In essence, this meant that the regional governor now had sweeping powers – the ability to evacuate villages without issuing a notice in advance, control worker union activities and could ban or confiscate any publications without judicial oversight. They were further granted immunity from any legal persecution in connection to acts committed under the new laws. The project will further analyse decrees concerning the village-guard system. These decrees, passed under President Turgut Özal led to the creation of the Village-Guards, an important factor in the context of the displacement of ethnic Kurds and Turks from the Southeast. The chapter argues that Turkey's depopulation policy, particularly under the State of Emergency (OHAL) from 1990 to 2002, was a deliberate strategy to control and assimilate the Kurdish population through extensive measures. It further highlights the broader implications of

² A collection of official OHAL-specific government decrees are available through the Turkish governments legislation archive (T.C. Cumhurbaşkanlığı Mevzuat Bilgi Sistemi).

using emergency powers to justify such policies, emphasizing the long-term consequences of forced displacement, unchecked authority and prolonged State of Emergencies (SoEs).

5.1 “Emergency” powers

The establishment of the OHAL (Olağanüstü Hal, or State of Emergency) region in 1987 marked a significant shift in the governance of certain provinces in Turkey. This period saw the implementation of various decrees that granted extensive powers to regional governors. These powers were expanded through successive decrees, which included authority over village evacuations, control over unions, and the imposition of publication bans.

One of the foundational decrees in 1987 empowered the regional governor to relocate or evacuate settlements and areas within the OHAL region. This decree marked the beginning of a systematic approach to controlling the population and maintaining security in the southeastern provinces, predominantly inhabited by Kurds. In April 1990, the powers of the regional governor were significantly expanded. The governor was granted the authority to ban, confiscate, or fine publications, control worker union activities, and evacuate villages without issuing prior notice. Decree 413, issued on April 9, 1990, provided a detailed framework for these expanded powers (Whitman 1990, 15-16). Decree 413 specifically targeted the press, allowing the governor to ban, confiscate, and fine any publications that "wrongly represent incidents occurring in a region under a State of Emergency, disturb its readers with distorted news stories or commentaries, cause anxiety amongst people in the region, or obstruct security forces in the performance of their jobs" (Whitman 1990, 15-16). This provision was significant because as it enabled the suppression of Kurdish dissenters, severely restricted the flow of information and consolidated the governor's control over the region.

In practice, this allowed the governor to shut down printing plants that published such materials and to control or prohibit all union activities, including strikes and lockouts, and prevent boycotts. Additionally, Decree 413 mandated state security court public prosecutors to open cases against individuals who violated these provisions. The penalties for supporting separatist activities were doubled, and the decree imposed severe penalties for publications that insulted high-level state officials, including imprisonment

of up to three years and a fine of \$40,000, half of which had to be paid by the responsible editor. The Turkish Radio and Television broadcasts relating to the OHAL region were also brought under the control of the Interior Ministry and the General Secretariat of the National Security Council (Whitman 1990, 15-16).

On May 9, 1990, the regional governor's powers were further expanded, allowing him to deport prosecutors, judges, or military personnel who did not handle matters to his satisfaction. This level of control over the judiciary and military personnel highlighted the extensive reach of the governor's authority under the state of emergency (Whitman 1990, 15-16).

On December 15, 1990, Decree No. 430 was issued, providing immunity from legal prosecution for governors regarding actions taken under their expanded powers. Article 7 of this decree stipulated that the exercise of powers conferred under the State of Emergency law could not be retracted or annulled by any court (Hughes 2006; 81-82) allowing governors to act with impunity. This provision effectively rendered the governors and security forces unaccountable for their actions, as Article 8 limited the right of action for damages caused by unlawful administrative action, excluding the liability of local governors or the regional governor for acts or decisions connected with the exercise of emergency powers (Buckley 2001; 5-6).

The powers granted to regional governors were put into practice through various measures that significantly impacted the Kurdish population in southeastern Turkey. For instance, numerous village evacuations were carried out, ostensibly for security reasons, but they often resulted in widespread displacement of Kurdish villagers. The extensive control over publications led to self-censorship among journalists and media outlets, severely restricting the flow of information from the region. The control over unions also stifled any labor movements that could potentially oppose the government's policies or support separatist activities.

The Turkish government's spatial strategies in the OHAL region were primarily aimed at controlling the Kurdish population through measures such as village evacuations and infrastructural changes. These strategies were implemented to disrupt the PKK's support base and exert greater control over the region.

Village evacuations were a central element of these spatial control measures. By forcibly relocating Kurdish villagers, the government aimed to depopulate areas that were believed to harbor PKK sympathizers. This not only disrupted the PKK's logistical and operational capabilities but also aimed to dilute the Kurdish presence in these regions.

Infrastructural projects, such as the construction of dams and resettlement areas, also played a crucial role in these spatial strategies. The building of dams, for example, led to the flooding of Kurdish villages, forcing residents to relocate to government-designated resettlement areas. These projects were often justified on the grounds of economic development and modernization but had the underlying objective of dispersing the Kurdish population and weakening their cultural and social cohesion. One prominent example of an infrastructural project was the construction of the Atatürk Dam, one of the largest dams in the world, which led to the displacement of tens of thousands of Kurdish villagers. The creation of the dam flooded extensive areas of Kurdish land, compelling residents to move to new settlements where they were more easily monitored and controlled by the state (Dissinger 2020, 19-21).

The depopulation policy and spatial strategies were, however, closely aligned with the Turkish government's ethnographic-nationalist goals. The aim was not only to suppress the PKK but also to assimilate the Kurdish population into the dominant Turkish culture. The Law on Resettlement No. 2510, enacted in 1934, exemplifies this long-standing objective. Although it was not fully implemented, the law outlined a plan to divide Turkey into three zones: areas predominantly inhabited by Turks, areas suitable for resettling Kurds, and areas to be completely evacuated of Kurds:

- **The First Zone:** This zone encompassed the areas where the 'original' Turkish populations resided, primarily located in the western regions of the state. The plan involved relocating people from this area to Kurdish-majority regions as part of the broader Turkification strategy.
- **The Second Zone:** Known as the 'receiver' areas, this zone was culturally and mentally aligned with Turkish identity, making it suitable for resettling Kurds from the eastern parts of the country. Here, the intention was for Kurds to gradually assimilate into the dominant Turkish population.

- **The Third Zone:** This zone consisted of regions designated for complete evacuation, where Kurdish tribes were concentrated, and Kurdish was the primary language. These areas were to serve as sources of refugees, with the displaced Kurds being relocated to the second zone. In their new locations, Kurds were restricted from forming more than 5% of the local population and were prohibited from establishing their own communities, organizations, or villages (Ceng 2010, 131).

This kind of planned logistical resettlement of Kurds into predominantly Turkish areas demonstrated clear intent for the implementation of a policy designed to facilitate systematic, methodical assimilation (Ceng 2010, 131 – 132). By dispersing Kurds into regions with a strong Turkish cultural presence, the government sought to erode Kurdish ethnic identity and promote the adoption of Turkish language and customs. Additionally, the ban on Kurdish cultural expressions, such as the prohibition of Kurdish language publications and the restriction of Kurdish political and social organizations, furthered these assimilation efforts. These policies aimed to suppress Kurdish cultural identity and replace it with a homogenized Turkish national identity.

The Role of the “State of Emergency”

It is important to note that the decrees in question are "emergency" decrees invoked on the grounds of the OHAL "state of emergency," which serves as their justification. The extensive powers granted to regional governors in Turkey under the OHAL decrees highlight how states can leverage emergency powers to exert control over specific regions and populations, often at the expense of civil liberties and human rights. This use of emergency powers is not unique to Turkey; it reflects a broader pattern observed globally where governments invoke a state of emergency (SoE) to address perceived threats. While SoEs are intended as temporary measures to protect national security or public order, they can evolve into prolonged states of exception that undermine democratic principles and individual freedoms.

A state of emergency (SoE) is usually declared in response to a situation that poses significant harm to the wellbeing of a society and its infrastructure. It is usually declared to enable the governing body to suspend normal constitutional procedures in favour of emergency plans that better tackle, minimise or alleviate the

potential threat posed by the situation. Although SoEs are generally announced as a temporary mechanism for the government to be able better address a crisis-type situation, in some cases, emergencies and the powers invoked to address them last much longer than initially bargained for e.g. when an emergency arises multiple times over (i.e. a recurrent emergency) or when it continues for a period of time that is longer than initially anticipated (i.e. prolonged emergency). Evan Criddle argues that derogation in time of emergency is best justified as a temporary political instrument for empowering states to protect human rights. Conversely, others like Giorgio Agamben (Agamben 2005) contend that the implementation of a state of emergency often leaves society more susceptible to slipping into autocratic rule, leaving society finds in a prolonged state of suspension where the state rests semi-permanently above the Rule of Law. In this way, announcing an SoE becomes a device for enabling the state to advance their own interests in a manner that compromises fundamental human rights and liberties.

Illustrative of a SoE mechanism in practice is Article 15 of European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) drafted by the Council of Europe - a derogation clause which allows contracting states to derogate from their usual obligations during a 'time of war or other public emergency threatening the life of the nation'. A state may permissibly derogate from its obligations set by the convention, provided the emergency under question satisfied a number of conditions (e.g. organized life of the community is under threat, threat is current or imminent, threat is exceptional) and that the states derogation does not conflict with its other obligations under international law. In March 2020, several countries such as Romania, Armenia, Estonia, the Republic of Moldova and Serbia notified the Council of Europe of their decision to invoke Article 15 for the first time as a response to the COVID-19 crisis. Until recently however, Article 15 had been invoked almost exclusively by two countries: first, by the United Kingdom in its relations with Northern Ireland and second, by Turkey in regard to the Kurdish Separatist Movement in South-Eastern region of the country.

Joan Fitzpatrick (1994) notes that such crises are "generally characterized by the strengthening of the executive to the detriment of judicial authority and parliamentary oversight" and defined by their recurrent invasion of absolute rights, heavier limitations on fundamental rights. In both cases, the

‘emergencies’ led to an increase in powers in the hands of the respective governments and a restraint of individual freedoms, rights and liberties as a result. It is notable then that the OHAL state of emergency in Turkey was not the first of its kind. The Turkish government has sporadically imposed States of Emergency in response to the Kurdish-Turkish conflict on several occasions: first in 1970, lasting five years; again in 1978, for two years; the longest period being in 1990, which extended over seven consecutive years; and later in 2003 and 2006 (Mariniello 2019, 50-51).

During the OHAL depopulation period beginning from 1990, the government extended the state of emergency under question a total of 46 times, continuing sporadically until 2002 after which it was significantly partialized during the Ecevit government. In essence, this means that most of the provinces in South-Eastern regions of Turkey have been under an ongoing declared state of emergency (or Martial Law) for a period stretching over 24 years. Hakan Yavuz contends that one of the major social costs/consequence of the conflict between PKK and the state was the ‘securement of normal life in these heavily Kurdish-populated provinces’. Scholars like Egemen B. Bezci and Güven Öztan (2016) have elaborated on this point, emphasising the large-scale change in Turkey’s economic, social and cultural landscape where the line between ‘exception’ and ‘norm’ became increasingly blurred.

The broad and unchecked powers granted to regional governors under OHAL provided the Turkish state with a legal and operational framework to undertake these policies with impunity. This section explores how the state of emergency facilitated the depopulation of Kurdish areas and the broader implications of these actions on the Kurdish community. The state of emergency, with its sweeping decrees, created an environment where the government could pursue its objectives of spatial control and demographic engineering with little to no oversight. The forced evacuation of villages under the guise of security measures was one of the most direct and impactful methods used to depopulate Kurdish regions. Villages that were suspected of harboring PKK sympathizers or being strategically valuable to the insurgents were particularly targeted.

The relocation of Kurdish villagers to government-designated resettlement areas was another key element of the depopulation strategy. These resettlement areas were often situated far from the original villages, in

regions with a strong Turkish cultural presence. By moving Kurdish populations into these areas, the government aimed to weaken their ethnic and cultural ties, thereby facilitating their assimilation into the dominant Turkish culture. The immunity from legal prosecution provided to regional governors and security forces under Decree No. 430 ensured that these actions could be carried out with little fear of accountability. This legal shield allowed for widespread human rights abuses, including the destruction of villages, extrajudicial killings, and the torture of detainees. This OHAL-State of Emergency was, in this way, part of a broader effort to dilute the Kurdish identity, which was seen as a threat to the unitary Turkish state.

To sum up, the 'emergency' decrees granting extensive powers to regional governors and the implementation of spatial strategies were instrumental in advancing the Turkish government's ethnographic-nationalist objectives. The OHAL period in Turkey serves as a reminder of the dangers inherent in the unchecked use of emergency powers. While such powers are often justified as necessary to protect the state, they can easily be manipulated to further state objectives that are detrimental to the rights and freedoms of vulnerable populations. These measures led to significant human rights abuses and the forced assimilation of the Kurdish population, highlighting the complex interplay between security policies and nationalist goals in the OHAL region.

Furthermore, the Turkish government's use of SOE powers during this period was instrumental in enabling the implementation of depopulation policies in the Southeast as it enabled them to take actions they could not do under the usual legal framework. It also illustrates the dangerous potential of such measures to serve as tools of repression rather than protection. The use of the state of emergency as a tool for implementing depopulation policies in the Kurdish region is a stark example of how emergency powers can be abused to advance state interests at the expense of minority rights, under the pretext of maintaining national security. The legacy of these policies continues to affect the Kurdish population, underscoring the long-term consequences of using emergency powers to enforce demographic and cultural engineering. This period serves as a critical reminder of the risks associated with the unchecked use of emergency powers and their ability to undermine human rights and perpetuate state-driven repression.

5.2 Village guard system

The Village Guard System, known as “Köy Korucuları” in Turkish, was established in the mid-1980s as a state-funded initiative aimed at combating the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) insurgency. This system was instituted under the leadership of President Turgut Özal, who sought to create a local militia that could provide immediate, on-the-ground defense against PKK attacks in rural areas. The rationale behind the establishment of the Village Guard System was multifaceted. It intended to prevent PKK guerrillas from gaining logistical support from local villages, ensure the security of rural settlements, and leverage the local knowledge and presence of villagers to counter the insurgents more effectively. A 2001 report from UK Home office describes the village-guard system as follows:

"The 'village guards' are armed and paid by the authorities to defend their villages against attack by the PKK and to deny them logistical support from the villages in the area. Although recruitment into the village guard corps is voluntary (indeed, some Kurdish tribes are pro-government and enthusiastic in their participation) refusal by individuals or entire villages to participate in the system is usually considered by the local forces as an indication of active or passive support for the guerrillas. The evacuation of the village, and its subsequent complete or partial destruction on security grounds, can follow a refusal to join." (UK Home Office April 2001, para. 6.19)

Whilst in theory, it is a voluntary decision to become a village guard, those who refuse risked facing grave repercussions by Turkish security forces. A 1998 report by Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe on the humanitarian situation of Kurdish refugees highlights that the ‘evacuation of villages refusing to join the village guard system is carried out by the army with extreme brutality and no civilian supervision. It is frequently accompanied by the destruction of property and further violation of human rights such as sexual assault and humiliation, beatings and extrajudicial executions’ (PACE 1998). Conversely, joining the village guard system itself sometimes posed the threat of retaliation by the PKK against the entire village, leaving the villagers with no option to stay uninvolved:

“PKK agents operated similar blanket systems of repression in which non-combatants were offered no neutral ground: every settlement was either PKK or village-guard protected, taxed and

policed. When villages, or even (as in the case of Sırnak in 1993) large towns, were seen as potential collaborators with the regime, 'loyal' Kurds were asked to leave so that the area could be transformed into 'a free military target' (Ozgur Gundem, 24 June 1993)" (Jacoby 2005, 650)

Historically, the creation of this system was rooted in the Turkish government's long-standing struggle to maintain control over the predominantly Kurdish southeastern regions of the country. By recruiting local villagers into a paramilitary force, the state aimed to create a buffer against the PKK and discourage local support for the insurgents. The involvement of local tribes, some of whom were pro-government, was critical in the implementation of this system, as their participation provided a semblance of legitimacy and community support for the state's efforts (UK Home Office April 2001, para. 6.19).

Structure and Function

The organizational structure of the Village Guard System was relatively straightforward. Village guards were armed and paid by the Turkish authorities, creating a semi-formal militia that operated alongside the national security forces. Recruitment into the Village Guard System was technically voluntary, but in practice, the choice was often coercive and predominantly targeted Kurdish villagers, capitalizing on their local knowledge and familiarity with the terrain. However, this also meant that the composition of the village guards was ethnically skewed, often exacerbating existing ethnic tensions. Village guards were responsible for defending their villages from PKK attacks, conducting patrols, and denying the insurgents logistical support from local communities. The dual role of defense and surveillance turned these guards into both protectors and enforcers of state policy, often placing them in precarious positions within their communities.

Impact on Depopulation

The Village Guard System had profound effects on the displacement of ethnic Kurds and Turks, significantly contributing to the depopulation of southeastern Turkey. The refusal to join the system frequently resulted in brutal retaliations by Turkish security forces. Entire villages faced evacuation, partial or complete destruction, and severe human rights abuses, including beatings, sexual assault, and

extrajudicial executions, as reported by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe in 1998.

These actions led to widespread fear and forced migrations, with many villagers fleeing to avoid such dire consequences (PACE 1998).

The displacement was not solely due to the coercive measures of the Turkish state; the PKK also played a role in this dynamic. Villages that joined the Village Guard System often became targets for PKK retaliation, creating a no-win situation for the inhabitants. For instance, in Sırnak in 1993, the PKK targeted areas perceived as collaborators with the Turkish regime, further driving the cycle of violence and displacement (Jacoby 2005, 650). The continuous military presence and operations against both PKK strongholds and resistant villages created an environment of instability and fear, leading to significant population movements both within Turkey and internationally.

By 1985, the percentage of the ethnic Kurdish population residing in rural areas had dramatically declined, dropping from 78% in 1970 to less than 58% by 1985 (O'Shea 2004). The impact of these policies was not merely confined to the OHAL regions. According to the UK Home Office several neighbouring provinces such as Kahramanmaraş, Sivas, Erzerum and Kangol were also affected (Home Office 2001) leading to the total evacuation of over 3,500 rural villages (IDMC 2001, 5). Several human rights reports highlight that these evacuations were often carried out with extreme brutality including physical and sexual violence, property destruction, beatings and extrajudicial killings (IDMC 2001, 20-22; UNCHR 2017, 7-23; HRW 1996). Official reports estimate the death toll during this period at 30,000, with approximately 2 million Kurds displaced as refugees (IDMC 2001, 20-22). However, limited access to the conflict zones has made it difficult to accurately assess the full extent of internal displacement in Turkey. The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC 2018) estimates that there are around 1,113,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) within the country. Figure 1 shows the number of Evacuated and Destroyed Villages between the years 1991-2001:

Figure 1. Evacuated and Destroyed Villages, 1991-2001

1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001
109	295	874	1,531	243	68	23	30	30	—	3

Source: Figure from Jongerden (2011) ; Data from Kurdish Human Rights Project (2002).

A recent study by Bilgi University suggests that 40% of Kurdish IDPs displaced during the Kurdish-Turkish conflict would like to return to their homeland (Medya News 2021). Since 1994, there have been a handful of attempted ‘resettlement’ and ‘relocation’ schemes that have had little or no effect. For example, the ‘Return to villages’ policy launched in 1995 by the Turkish government was largely unsuccessful due to opposition by OHAL governors and armed forces. Of the 50,000 families (or 400,000 people) that applied as part of the project for permission to return to their places of origin, nearly two-thirds were ruled ‘invalid’ as a result of security concerns (USCR 2002, 96). Emergency governor Erkan echoed these security concerns stating that the displaced ‘should stay where they migrated’ (USCR 1999, 21). A report by the U.S. Committee of Refugees states that whilst the government may have had ambitious plans as part of the ‘Return to Villages’ Project, ‘the military and other-security minded forces obstructed its implementation’ (USCR 1999, 21).

Despite this, reports by the Turkish Interior Ministry state that in between June 2000 and the end of 2001, an estimated 35,513 IDPs were returned to their original villages (USCR 2002). This process seems to have be fraught with obstacles. In a 2002 assessment of the situation, the Representative of the Secretary-General on the Human Rights of Internally Displaced Persons, Walter Kalin, said whilst the Turkish state ‘had pursued return programmes, including the Return to Village and Rehabilitation Project, overall progress has been slow and many problems remain to be solved’ (General Assembly 2002). According to separate reports by NGO Turkish Human Rights Foundation, would-be returnees continued to be hindered from returning to their villages and prevented from farming or rebuilding in the locale of their villages in 2001 (USCR 2002).

In the second half of 1997, an influx of asylum-seekers was reported in Denmark, Germany, France, the Netherlands, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom (PACE 1998). Germany, in particular, which has been a popular destination for the Kurdish community in Turkey had between 450,000 and 600,000 Kurds in 1998 – 80% of whom were ‘Turkish Kurds’ (PACE 1998). At the same time, France reportedly had around 100,000 whilst the Benelux countries numbered between 120,000 and 130,000 (PACE 1998). This displacement also created a significant humanitarian crisis, as many of those who fled their homes lacked the resources to secure stable housing and livelihoods. In essence, efforts to address the displacement and its aftermath have been sporadic and insufficient. While there have been occasional government initiatives aimed at resettlement and compensation, these have often been hampered by bureaucratic inefficiencies and lack of political will.

Moreover, the displacement had political ramifications, fuelling further Kurdish nationalism and resistance against the Turkish state. The harsh measures employed by the government and the continued military operations against the PKK only intensified the resolve of many Kurds to seek greater autonomy and recognition of their rights. Turkey’s depopulation policy, in this sense, not only aimed to weaken the PKK by severing its ties with the local population but also served to reinforce a binary conflict narrative that left little room for alternative solutions or moderate positions. This binary framework, which essentially framed the conflict as a clear-cut struggle between the Turkish state and the PKK, was instrumental in exacerbating ethnic tensions. The deliberate exclusion of potential avenues for peaceful resolution or negotiation suggests that the Turkish state’s objectives extended beyond merely combating a security threat. By fostering an environment of polarized conflict, the state could justify its aggressive policies under the guise of national security, while simultaneously pursuing ethnonationalist goals that sought to undermine and assimilate the Kurdish population.

However, this approach had the paradoxical effect of both weakening and strengthening the PKK. On one hand, the systematic displacement and repression disrupted the PKK’s logistical networks and support base, forcing the insurgency to adapt to increasingly hostile conditions. On the other hand, the severity of the state’s actions likely bolstered the PKK’s narrative of resistance, galvanizing support among Kurds who were alienated by the government’s oppressive tactics. The prolonged state of

emergency thus served a dual purpose: it allowed the state to maintain a near-permanent state of exception in the Kurdish regions, facilitating the implementation of its depopulation and assimilation policies, while also entrenching the conflict in a way that made other, less destructive solutions appear untenable. This two-sided, no-alternative situation arguably benefited the state by marginalizing moderate Kurdish voices that might have sought dialogue or political solutions, thereby reinforcing the narrative that the Kurdish question could only be addressed through force.

In this context, the use of emergency powers can be seen as a deliberate strategy to create a controlled environment where the state's ethnonationalist objectives could be pursued under the cover of security concerns. The overlap between these security and ethnonationalist aims is evident in the way the state's actions not only targeted the PKK but also sought to erode Kurdish identity more broadly. The result was a situation where the state's pursuit of national security became inextricably linked with a project of ethnic erasure, with long-lasting consequences for the Kurdish population in Turkey.

5.3 Findings

The implementation of Turkey's depopulation policies, as delineated in this chapter, reveals a deeply rooted ethno-nationalist agenda. The expansion of regional governors' powers and the establishment of the village guard system were not merely administrative or security measures but were part of a broader strategy aimed at altering the demographic and cultural landscape of the southeastern region, predominantly inhabited by Kurds. The OHAL decrees granted regional governors sweeping powers, enabling them to evacuate villages, suppress union activities, and control media without judicial oversight.

The decrees facilitated the forced displacement of Kurdish populations through village evacuations and infrastructural projects like dam constructions, which disrupted traditional Kurdish settlements. These measures were intended to weaken the PKK by removing its support base, but they also served to dilute Kurdish cultural and social cohesion, aligning with the Turkish government's long-standing objective of assimilating Kurds into the dominant Turkish culture. The historical context provided by the Law on Resettlement No. 2510 highlights the ethno-nationalist underpinnings of these policies, aimed at dividing and resettling Kurds to promote Turkish national identity.

The village guard system further exemplified this ethno-nationalist strategy. While presented as a voluntary initiative, refusal to join often led to severe repercussions, including village evacuations and destruction. This system placed Kurdish villagers in a precarious position, caught between the retaliatory actions of both the Turkish state and the PKK. The coercive recruitment into the village guards and the subsequent violence underscored the state's intent to control and assimilate the Kurdish population through fear and displacement.

Overall, the Turkish government's policies during the 1990-2002 period were not just about combating the PKK but were fundamentally about reshaping the ethnic composition of the southeastern region. The extensive powers granted to regional governors and the implementation of the village guard system were instrumental in advancing ethnographic-nationalist objectives, leading to widespread human rights abuses and the forced assimilation of the Kurdish population. This chapter underscores the complex interplay between security measures and nationalist goals, revealing the inherent ethno-nationalist nature of Turkey's depopulation policy.

6. Conclusion

The thesis has provided an in-depth analysis of the Turkish state's depopulation policy in Southeastern Turkey from 1990 to 2002, particularly focusing on the forced displacement and resettlement of ethnic Kurds during the Kurdish-Turkish conflict. The findings of the thesis indicate that (1) Turkey's depopulation policy was driven by a complex interplay of strategic and ethnocentric ideological motivations. On one hand, the policy aimed to deprive insurgents of essential environmental resources by displacing the rural Kurdish population, a strategic measure commonly observed in ethnic conflicts. This 'spatial' strategy sought to undermine the logistical support base of the Kurdish insurgents by relocating the population to urban areas where state control was stronger and insurgent activity could be more effectively monitored. By disrupting the rural Kurdish population's ability to provide support and shelter to insurgents, the Turkish state sought to weaken the insurgency's operational capabilities.

At the same time, the thesis argues that (2) the overarching motivation behind this policy was rooted in ethno-nationalist objectives. The Turkish state's pursuit of an 'ethnicized' Turkish identity, coupled with

the historical marginalization of the Kurds as an ethnic out-group, underscores the exclusionary nature of the policy. The OHAL-state of emergency facilitated these ethno-nationalist aims by granting the state unprecedented powers, such as the deployment of special state-funded militias and the provision of judicial immunity for regional governors, enabling actions that would not be permissible under normal circumstances. This framework allowed for a range of measures, from village evacuations to forced urban resettlement, the majority of which were aimed at reducing the presence and influence of the Kurdish population in their traditional homeland.

The thesis looked at Turkey's OHAL region both in *principle* and in *practice* by considering both the aims and goals of the policy as well as its implementation. By examining both the strategic and ideological dimensions, this thesis fills a crucial gap in the scholarly literature on forced displacement in civil-conflict contexts. It highlights how states may leverage emergency powers to pursue broader ethno-nationalist goals, often at the expense of marginalized populations. The Turkish case study serves as a poignant example of how state policies, under the guise of counter-terrorism and national security, can perpetuate ethnic displacement and reinforce dominant national identities. The dual nature of these policies—combining military strategy with ideological imperatives—demonstrates the multifaceted approach taken by the Turkish state in its efforts to resolve the Kurdish issue.

In analysing the policy's implementation, the thesis (3) underscores the significance of the OHAL regime in providing the legal and administrative framework necessary for such large-scale displacement efforts. The extraordinary powers granted to regional governors and security forces under OHAL were instrumental in executing the depopulation policy. These powers included curfews, restricted movement, and the authority to evacuate and demolish villages deemed supportive of the insurgency. Such measures were justified by the state as essential for national security and counter-terrorism, yet their implementation often resulted in severe human rights violations and long-term socioeconomic disruptions for the Kurdish population.

Overall, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of the motivations and impacts of forced displacement policies in conflict settings, emphasizing the need to critically assess the interplay between state strategies and ethno-nationalist ideologies in shaping population movements. It calls for a nuanced

approach to studying state-led displacement, recognizing the complex motivations behind such policies and the multifaceted impacts on affected populations. The findings underscore the importance of addressing both the immediate humanitarian needs of displaced individuals and the broader structural issues that underlie forced displacement policies.

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Appendix A

Research Question			
Why was an strategic displacement/depopulation policy pursued by the Turkish state in the context of a State of Emergency (SoE) between 1990 and 2002?			
Theme	Code	Description	Example
	Code 1B: Focus on spatial control of region		
	Code 1C: Aim to deprive insurgents of physical resource (e.g. deprive PKK of regional recruitment grounds)		
Theme 2 > Ethno-nationalist aims	Code 2A: Stress/focus on 'nationhood' as bound by common language, faith or ethnic ancestry		
	Code 2B: Active negative attitude towards ethnic out-group		
Theme 3 > SoE strategy	Code 3A: Special or exceptional regulation of region e.g. judicial immunity for governors or no-access zone		

	Code 3B: Deployment of special state-funded militias or resources e.g. village-guards		
Theme 3 > Non- SoE strategy	Code 3A: Standard or typical regulation of region		
	Code 3B: Deployment of standard government military and paramilitary e.g. Turkish armed forces		

Appendix B:

Figure 1. Evacuated and Destroyed Villages, 1991-2001

1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001
109	295	874	1,531	243	68	23	30	30	–	3

Source: Figure from Jongerden (2011) ; Data from Kurdish Human Rights Project (2002).